

[Gates of Vienna News Feed 1/23/2009](#)

Gates of Vienna

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Body

Jan. 23, 2009 ([Gates of Vienna](#) delivered by Newstex) -- Watch the news stories from Italy. More than any other European country, the Italians are responding vigorously and authoritatively to the issues of mass immigration and Islamization. Look in the œEurope and the EU section and scroll down to see the Italian articles. Thanks to C. Cantoni, CB, Fjordman, Gaia, heroyalwhyness, Insubria, [Islam in Action](#), JD, LN, [Paul Green](#), [Steen](#), Tuan Jim, VH, and all the other tipsters who sent these in. Headlines and articles are below the fold. - - - - -

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[Dont Fall for the Islamist Letter, Barack Obama](#)Over the years the open letter has become a very popular tool for the Islamists, and one which they utilised yet again yesterday in a crass attempt at influencing the Obama administration to base its foreign policy on how appease Islamists and thus prevent them from killing people all over the world. According to the letter, it has been signed by œscientists, thinkers, intellectuals, political activists, jurists, and academics from the Islamic nation. These include one of the leading members of the Muslim Brotherhood, Yusuf al-Qaradawi and head of the Jamaat-e-Islami, Qadhi Hussein Ahmad. This letter is the latest manifestation of the now well-established method of appealing to those who insist that the United States has only itself to blame for the rise in international terrorism. Just as bin Laden and Zawahiri have made public statement that, if troops left Iraq and Afghanistan, then al-Qaeda would call it quits, this letter suggests that if Obama were to pull the troops out, there would be no more œresistance. It reads: œThe resistance in some Muslim countries is a result of the aggression, injustice and tyranny practised or sponsored by the United States, and such resistance is not the cause of violence and terrorism as some circles in America like to claim. Therefore, if such resistance troubles you and you wish peace to spread over, you have to end occupation and return to the peoples their rights and sovereignty. This is of course contrary to the words and actions of this œresistance, who are not motivated only by the US presence in Iraq and Afghanistan, but also, to name but a few, by their obsession with creating an Islamic state, their hatred of the democratic institutions that are now in place in both of these nations, and their disgust at the gall that their women are showing by getting an education. The letter tries to justify the reasons for Islamist terrorism as simply a reaction to recent US imperialism in the Middle East, which does not explain why the September 11 attacks occurred before any US presence in Iraq and Afghanistan. But wait, they have found an ingenious way of getting around this tricky subject:?? the events of the 11th of September 2001 were nothing but fabricated drama by some influential forces in America in co-ordination with Israeli Mossad. They have done all that in order to find a reason to trigger the Third World war that they have already planned for and decided its goals and

targeted fields. There are a number of references to the suffering of the Palestinian people, not in itself an unreasonable complaint, although they do border on the hyperbolic: "We deeply realise that every sane person believes deep inside that no other nation in history has suffered injustice like the one inflicted upon the Palestinian people. If we were to consider this as a genuine effort at highlighting to the President the plight of Muslims around the world, rather than an attempt to further worldwide Islamist causes, then of course one would expect to see some mention of the hundreds of thousands of Muslim Darfuris being slaughtered at the hands of the al-Bashir regime. Why, one might ask, has such a massacre been omitted from this litany of atrocities being committed against Muslims? A quick glance at some more of the cosignatories explains it all. They include the former Minister for Religious affairs in Hassan al-Turabi's National Islamic Front party (NIF), Esam Ahmed Al-Bashir, and one of the founding members of the current Sudanese regime, Abdul Rahman Siwar al-Dhahb. Although it is unlikely that any of Obama's people will even see this letter, it is absolutely crucial that they do not fall for this sort of intimidation, especially when it comes from some of the leading members of the most powerful and influential Islamist groups in the world.

" Hat tip: Tuan Jim

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[Egyptian Troops Training in Texas](#) **Secretive U.S. technology to assist in finding Hamas weapons tunnels** HERZLIYA, Israel " Egyptian troops are undergoing training in Texas on the use of American military technology to uncover Hamas weapons smuggling tunnels, WND has learned. A top Egyptian intelligence official told WND the Egyptian troops arrived in Texas in recent days, where they have been undergoing private courses on the use of proprietary, secretive U.S. technology that makes use of sonar and certain frequencies to locate underground tunnels along the Egypt-Gaza border. Also, the intelligence official said a team from the U.S. Army's Corps of Engineers recently arrived in the Egyptian Sinai desert, bringing the advanced machinery with them. The Army has been aiding Egyptian troops in locating the tunnels.

" Hat tip: JD

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[Feel Like a Chump?](#) You work hard, take care of your family, and pay all the taxes the government says you owe as is typical of honest, upright citizens. But what happens to your tax money? It is now going to bail out firms that pay their senior executives millions of dollars a year. Congress also intends to spend your tax dollars on an \$825 billion stimulus program filled with many dubious projects and plain old-fashioned pork. Many good economists who have looked at the details of the stimulus package believe it has much more dead-stimulus than stimulus in it and will make the American economy worse off rather than better off. While you may have thought you are required by law to pay taxes on all your income, you learn the important folks in Washington seem to think paying taxes is optional. Chairman Charles Rangel of the House Ways and Means Committee responsible for writing tax legislation has admitted he did not pay the required income taxes on some of his private income (Caribbean rental properties, etc.); and the proposed Secretary of the Treasury, Tim Geithner, did not pay the required income tax on part of his income from the International Monetary Fund, where he worked for several years. It gets worse. Senate Majority Harry Reid, Nevada Democrat, has repeatedly said paying taxes is voluntary (see YouTube video <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LQIKJqLlqaE>) and that Mr. Geithner's failure to pay taxes was merely a hiccup. Many other leaders from both houses of Congress claim this failure to pay taxes was a minor oversight and hiccup and should not disqualify Mr. Geithner from overseeing the IRS, which, of course, enforces the tax law that Mr. Rangel's committee writes and Congress passes.

" Hat tip: JD

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[Marines Ordered to Stay Clear of Tijuana](#) CAMP PENDLETON, Calif., Jan. 22 (UPI) " U.S. Marines in Southern California must stay clear of Tijuana, Mexico, and other nearby R&R spots due to Mexican violence, a Marine Corps officer ordered. Lt. Gen. Samuel Hellands order restricts travel by the 44,000 members of the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force based at Camp Pendleton, about 50 miles north of the border city. The limits, first put in place around Christmas, are now indefinite, a military spokesman said. "The situation in Mexico is now more dangerous than usual, civilian public information officer Mike Alvarez told USA Today. "The intent is just to look out for the Marines safety and well-being, he said.

" Hat tip: JD

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[Mom: Accused Boca Raton Carjacker Arrested 190 Times is Bipolar](#) That arrest came shortly before midnight Tuesday, when police said Farrell attempted to carjack a man who had pulled his truck into the coffee shops parking lot in the 2500 block of North Federal Highway. Farrell asked the victim for a ride and when he refused, Farrell threatened to blow his brains out, police said. The trucks owner told police Farrell then reached for his waistband as though he were reaching for a gun. "Hes somebody we have been dealing with for years, police spokeswoman Officer Sandra Boonenberg said. "He lives locally and apparently likes Boca Raton .Farrell was charged with carjacking, possession of marijuana and possession of paraphernalia and was being held without bond in the West County Detention Center in Belle Glade. Farrells mother, Helene Farrell, said her son has struggled with severe mental illness since his teens. She said he is diagnosed with bipolar, once known as manic depression, a mental illness that causes people to swing between severe depression and extreme highs. "Its extremely important that people know hes bipolar and hes mentally ill, his mother said Thursday. "My point is we have to look at the other side of the picture, we have been dealing with this since he was 14 and it is almost impossible to get him the help he needs. She appealed to members of the community to bear in mind her sons mental illness when they consider his travails in the criminal justice system.

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[Mumbai in Brooklyn?!?](#) Every normal civilized person is still shuddering at the horror in Mumbai at the end of November past. The senseless murders of innocents, the savagery, the barbarism, the hatred exhibited by Islamofascist terrorists was appalling as the world was glued to the news reports about the events and especially what was taking place at the Chabad Center in Mumbai. I just read the following at Militant Islam Monitor.org: **Chabad Lubavitch headquarters threatened with attack by NY based radical Muslim group** January 22, 2009MIM: The Chabad Lubavitch movement posted this information on their website. Threats Made Against 770 Tuesday, there was a huge police presence following threats that were made against the community on a Muslim blog. This morning, NYPD Commissioner Raymond Kelly made a phone call to Chanina Sperlin from the inauguration ceremony in Washington DC, to discuss threats against 770. Last week, the Department of Homeland Security sponsored the installation of security systems in and around 770. Report & Photos Along with the expected stir Inauguration day caused across the nation on Tuesday morning, Crown Heights residents saw a tremendous visible police presence following threats that were made against the community on a Muslim blog. This morning, NYPD Commissioner Raymond Kelly made a phone call to Chanina Sperlin, vice president of the Crown Heights Jewish Community Council from the inauguration ceremony in Washington DC, to discuss threats against 770. [i]

" Hat tip: heroyalwhyness

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[News Access Issues Concern Those Covering Obama](#) NEW YORK (AP) " News organizations that cover the White House sparred with the Obama administration on Thursday over access issues for photographers and rules for briefings. Representatives from Obamas press office held a conference call with photo editors, who are concerned that the administration prefers distributing photos taken by a White House photographer in cases where photojournalists have been permitted access in the past. It was unclear whether the two sides had reached any accommodation. The Associated Press, Reuters and Agence France-Presse refused to distribute photos taken by the White House of the new president on his first day in the Oval Office because of the dispute. Still photographers were also not given access to Obamas do-over oath of office administered Wednesday night by Chief Justice John Roberts and an economics meeting on Thursday. Television network bureau chiefs also protested the exclusion of video cameras from the second oath of office. "Were in an awkward phase and there will be bumps in the road, said Christopher Isham, CBS News Washington bureau chief. "Hopefully they will be speed bumps rather than obstacles. Four reporters witnessed the oath of office and shared their observations with others, and a White House photo was released. "We think it was done in a way that was upfront and transparent, White House press secretary Robert Gibbs said in a briefing when questioned why video cameras were not present. Pressed on the matter, Gibbs said, "ewe would have had to get a bigger room. The Associated Press also questioned on Thursday why reporters were not allowed to use the names of administration officials giving a background briefing on issues regarding the Guantanamo Bay detention center in Cuba. Background briefings are hardly new in Washington, and were frequently conducted during the Bush and Clinton administrations. But the AP wanted to establish early with the administration that its important to get information on the record as often as possible, said Michael Oreskes, managing editor for U.S. news. "Information is a lot more valuable to the public if you know where its coming from,

Oreskes said. œSo we try very hard in all source situations to identify sources as fully as we can. Gibbs did not directly address the issue when asked about it later, saying that œI hope that you all found the exercise that we did the morning helpful.

" Hat tip: Tuan Jim

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[Obamas Vain Beginning](#) Never forget the difference between good-sounding reasons and good sound reasoning. That was one of the first admonitions I remember hearing from my debate coach in high school. Barack Obamas address at the high-priced ceremony marking his first day as an occupant of the White House is a masterful symphony of good sounding reasons, filled with allusions to Americas founding principles, high ideals and high-minded purposes. Yet in the whole of it, there is not one shred of reasoning based on those principles, not one line that takes true account of their content and deliberately connects it with the view of government he articulates, or the wisps of policy he rhetorically flourishes. He uses words that evoke the founding ideals to give his assertions an aura of legitimacy, but he does not accept them as the starting point for deliberate reasoning that would justify those assertions. He respects their usefulness, not their authority. Though Obama cleverly exploits the positive emotions still evoked by references to our founding ideals, he speaks without regard for the understanding that justifies those emotions, the logic that transforms them from good feelings to reasonable convictions; from vague hopes to truths which inform our lives and deserve our allegiance; and that we can sustain in the face of great sacrifice, pain and danger, even unto death. Because he refuses to acknowledge the vision of faith and reason actually articulated in our founding documents, his effort to portray the hard work and sacrifices of previous generations falls woefully short, in terms of truth and effectiveness: [i]

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[Pa. Defense Firm Raided by FBI](#) Federal agents raided the offices of a Western Pennsylvania defense contractor that has received millions in federal earmarks at the request of Rep. John Murtha, according to local media reports. The offices of Kuchera Industries and Kuchera Defense Systems were shuttered for the day following the raids, the chief financial officer told the Johnstown Tribune-Democrat. The companies phone system says they will open again Friday morning, and e-mails sent to top company officials went unanswered. Based in Windber, Pa., just outside Johnstown, Kuchera won \$8.2 million in federal defense earmarks in the 2008 budget. The earmarks came at the request of Murtha (D-Pa.). Murthas spokesman declined to comment, and an agent in the FBIs Pittsburgh office did not return calls seeking clarification.

" Hat tip: JD

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[Report: Merrill Lynch CEO Spent Over \\$1m to Redecorate Office](#) **Before Accepting Bailout Billions, Exec Said To Have Hired Decorator-To-The-Stars; Purchased Luxury Furnishings** Less than one month into his new gig at the Bank of America, Merrill Lynch CEO John Thain resigned today after it was revealed that he doled out executive bonuses a month ahead of schedule and just days before his struggling Merrill Lynch firm was acquired by the BofA. Although no reason was given for his resignation, a spokesman for Bank of America, which acquired Merrill Lynch at the beginning of this year in a government-negotiated deal to save it from collapse, issued a statement saying: œ(BofA Chairman and CEO) Ken Lewis flew to New York today to talk to John Thain. And it was mutually agreed that his situation was not working out and he would resign. The amount in bonuses paid out was between \$3 and \$4 billion, according to the Financial Times. Exorbitant Wall St. bonuses have garnered increased attention since the economic collapse and subsequent billions in bailout funds have gone to help companies stay afloat.[i] To make matters worse, Thain is now facing more criticism for reportedly spending \$1.2 million to lavishly decorate his Merrill Lynch office early last year while the firm was fighting to survive. Thain splurged on interior designs from the Obamas chosen White House decorator Michael Smith (\$800,000), two area rugs (\$131,000), two guest chairs (\$87,000), a 19th Century credenza (\$68,000), four pairs of curtains (\$28,000), and a mahogany pedestal table (\$25,000), according to Charlie Gasparino, the CNBC contributor and Daily Beast columnist who broke the story. Other items mentioned: six dining room chairs (\$37,000), a George IV Desk (\$18,000), a custom coffee table (\$16,000), a sofa (\$15,000), a chandelier (\$13,000), a mirror (\$5,000), six wall sconces (\$2,700). Also reported to be on the list was a trash can for \$1,400.

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[The Big Lie About Obama and Race](#)

A government-employed affirmative action officer by the name of Carolyn Pitts wrote the following: All white individuals are racist. In the United States, at present, only whites can be racists since whites dominate and control the institutions that create and enforce American cultural norms and values. † [Frederick R. Lynch, *œInvisible Victims: White Males and the Crisis of Affirmative Action*, 1991.] Pitts is insignificant in the grand scheme of the states racial re-education machine. She worked for the New York State Insurance Fund writing hate-filled manuals used in employee training seminars. The poison Pitts penned for a pretty price ‐ in 1985, this black woman earned \$38,872 ‐ encapsulates the life sentence pronounced upon white America. From media megaphones to pedagogues, the hoary old fallacy of American racism is amplified and reinforced ad nauseam. Throughout the presidential campaign ‐ and to emphasize the countrys racial backwardness ‐ the popular press kept at it: œIs the country ready for a black president? œWill Americans ever elect a black man as president? These were the campaigns most repeated refrains. To which my response has been consistent: America is not remotely racist. If anything, Americans are remarkably naïve about human differences ‐ cultural or racial.

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[The End of Torture](#)

Obama banishes Bushs interrogation tactics

In the first sign of friction within his new administration, President Obama overruled the pleas of senior U.S. intelligence officials and signed a new executive order that bars the CIA from using harsh interrogation methods beyond those permitted by the U.S. military. The order was one of four sweeping directives Obama signed calling for the closure of the U.S. detention facility at Guantánamo Bay and revamping U.S. counterterrorism policies. The executive orders, while expected, represented a clean break with Bush administration policies and won quick praise from human-rights groups. Still, many of the difficult details ‐ such as what to do with Guantánamo detainees still deemed dangerous ‐ will be left up to a special interagency panel that wont report its recommendations to Obama for six months. The panel is to be chaired by Obamas choice for attorney general, Eric Holder, who is still awaiting confirmation. In perhaps his most far-reaching and potentially controversial move, Obama ordered that the CIA immediately cease using any interrogation techniques that are not already authorized in the U.S. Army Field Manual. He also ordered the CIA to close, œas expeditiously as possible, any secret detention facilities overseas and begin immediate compliance with Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions, which prohibits œhumiliating and degrading treatment of prisoners. [!]

In recent days, senior U.S. intelligence officials, including CIA Director Michael Hayden and outgoing Director of National Intelligence Mike McConnell, told Obamas advisers and journalists that they still needed the flexibility to use some interrogation methods not permitted by the military. If nothing else, intel officials argued, inducing fear among detainees that they might be subjected to harsh practices was useful in persuading them to talk. œThey were permitted to state their case, said one senior Obama adviser, who asked not be identified talking about internal deliberations. But in the end, Obamas review team, headed by new White House Counsel Gregory Craig, rejected their arguments and questioned the premise that such methods were necessary. Obama is satisfied that the use of the military field manual œwill not compromise national security, said another senior administration official, who also asked not to be identified talking about the administrations review process.

‐ Hat tip: JD

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[Theyre Poor Winners, Too](#)

Leftists are always lecturing Republicans and conservatives on the importance of civility and bipartisanship yet revealing, whether winner or losing, that they are the ones who need lessons in manners and collegiality. If you arent convinced of the lefts nonpareil arrogance and nastiness from observing their behavior toward President Bush and Vice President Cheney for the past eight years, then contrast the behavior of Mr. Bushs staff leaving office and that of Mr. Clintons, which literally trashed the White House like juvenile delinquents. Fast-forwarding to this week, did you see Obama supporters booing President Bush at the inauguration, singing, œNa, na, na, na, hey, hey, hey, goodbye? Pure class. The Washington Times reported that these same Obama supporters mocked Mr. Cheney œwith derisive laughter when he appeared on huge TV screens by the Capitol grounds, rolling down a ramp in a wheelchair after suffering a back injury moving out of his Naval Observatory home. ‐Good riddance! one man yelled. Nor was it just rude mobs at the parade. œHardball host Chris Matthews wasnt content to bask in his euphoria over Obamas assumption of office. Like many of his colleagues, he needed to kick Bush as he was going out the door. œThere'll be no more bullying of the world, no more acting like one of the bad guys on occasion. Were going to try again to be the good guy of the world and to get along with our fellow democracies. It is a dramatic change thats to come. Dramatic, indeed, Chris. [!]

‐ Hat tip: JD

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[USA: Gitmo and the "Black Death"](#) Within hours of his inauguration, President Barack Hussein Obama issued executive orders closing Gitmo, the CIA's secret prison network and suspended military tribunals. President Obama freely admits he has no clue what to do about the 250 inmates now housed there, but he's given his staff a year to come up with an answer. I would have certainly felt a lot more confident about the future if his first official act had been more thoughtful. He's only been in office a matter of hours and he's already hamstringing his own administration. What about future threats? The day before Obama took the oath of office, British newspapers reported the deaths of up to 40 terrorists in Algeria from the "Black Death" the Plague.

" Hat tip: JD

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[W.Va. Farmers Aim at Growing Muslim Market](#) SOUTH CHARLESTON, W.Va. (AP) " In a room where farmers in camouflage baseball caps and John Deere jackets mix with women in head scarves, Larry Gardner is scolding himself for forgetting Ramadan last year. After 30 years raising lambs, the Waverly farmer is learning something new about the business. There's a growing demand in West Virginia for sheep and goats from Muslim residents tired of traveling hundreds of miles for meats prepared in accordance with their faith's dietary requirements. At the same time, West Virginia's farmers are eager for new customers. Putting these two constituencies in the same room at South Charleston's Islamic Center was largely the work of Almeshia Brown, an agriculture and natural resources specialist at West Virginia State University Extension Service, who is also a Muslim. Tired of using the Internet to buy groceries, Brown saw the seminar as a chance to supply a growing ethnic market and bring new customers to state farmers. About 60 people " farmers, grocery store owners, an imam and a rabbi " met recently for a seminar on getting West Virginia meat onto the tables of Muslims, which included a crash course on halal. Meaning "lawful or "permitted, halal encompasses far more than food. But in dietary matters, it establishes which animals can be eaten and how they must be slaughtered " conscious, upright, the throat cut and the blood drained. At first glance, West Virginia seems an unlikely laboratory for such an experiment. With only a handful of mosques, few people here make big plans for Eid al-Fitr, which concludes the sacred month of Ramadan, or attend many aqeeqahs, a ceremony held after a child's birth. "If you look at West Virginia's population as a whole, you're just a bunch of white people who come from Northern Europe and don't eat sheep or goat, Susan Schoenian told the crowd. Schoenian is a sheep and goat expert with the University of Maryland Extension Service. West Virginia's demographics are atypical " with a population roughly 95 percent white, it's one of the least diverse states in the country. But there are pockets of the state " Charleston, the university towns of Morgantown and Huntington " where the Muslim population is growing. On average, American Muslims are younger, better educated and more affluent than their non-Muslim neighbors, which is music to a marketer's ears. "There's more demand than supply here right now, said Rich Durham, who once raised goats and sheep in Pinch and is getting back into it. Durham's wife, Pam, also noted that the relatively small market in West Virginia is a good fit for "mini-farms like hers. Exporting the meat to states with larger Muslim populations is not an option yet. Until recently, federal law banned interstate shipment of meat that hadn't been inspected by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which typically happens only at larger plants. Although the law has changed, federal rules allowing more interstate commerce haven't been formulated yet, said West Virginia Department of Agriculture spokesman Buddy Davidson, so the old prohibition remains. Even in West Virginia, though, there's growing demand. Families routinely call Imam Ehteshamul Haque, the spiritual leader of the local Muslim community, looking for lambs or goat on special occasions such as Eid al-Fitr or for an aqeeqah. Right now, Haque has to find a Muslim or halal-friendly butcher in another state. Generally, they won't do business unless it's a large order. "Sometimes they come late, sometimes they bring stuff we don't want, Haque said. Ahmed Barkiya, owner of Barakah International Groceries in Charleston, makes twice-monthly trips to Detroit to meet his customers' demand for halal meats. The seminar let him meet local suppliers, and get a statewide directory of farms. Supplying the animals is important, but there are still problems, especially when it comes to the actual slaughtering. Animals killed for halal meat can't be processed in slaughterhouses at the same time as swine, which is forbidden for Muslims. In the absence of a halal slaughterhouse among West Virginia's 24 state-inspected abattoirs, there's the option of "on-farm slaughter, in which a customer buys the animal, kills it and butchers it on the farm. It can be done, but as Schoenian told the crowd, "No one likes to know you're killing a goat in your garage. If farmers see enough of a boost in business from the halal market, though, they can think about investing in things like mobile abattoirs. For the time being, the people in baseball caps and the people in head scarves just seem pleased to have found each other. "Today's farmer has to adapt, Gardner said. "If you try to do business the way you did 30 years ago, you're going to be left behind."

[Canada: the Bad-Idea Quartet](#)Canada has six living former prime ministers. So when four of them get together to urge the current federal government to incorporate a ægreen stimulus package into the upcoming budget, the joint effort sounds pretty impressive ! until you realize that among the four of them " Joe Clark, John Turner, Kim Campbell and Paul Martin " they spent just 42 months in office. Thats a total of three-and-a-half years, less the a full term for a typical majority government. Only two of them " Messrs. Clark and Martin " were ever elected to the job. And only one " Mr. Martin " spent as much as a year (actually, 26 months) as PM. If these folks have any special expertise in the field of environmentalism, they hid it well during their tenures..(Tellingly, the two living former prime ministers who did win majorities " Brian Mulroney and Jean Chrétien " were not party to the call for environmentally friendly spending.) This week, big unions, left-wing think-tanks and environmental groups put the less-than-impressive assemblage of former leaders together in order to flog their \$41-billion wish list of budget initiatives. (One is reminded of record producers putting boy bands together. Which one, we wonder, is the bad boy?) Its the second time in less than six months that the quartet have lent their signatures to an environmental initiative designed to embarrass the government of Stephen Harper. The first time was back in September, during the federal election campaign, when the same four ex-prime ministers joined with Naomi Klein, Margaret Atwood, union, student and ethnic leaders to push an initiative known as æTime to Get Serious on Climate Change, an effort that fell with a thud as soon as it was launched. Like most calls for green spending, this current demand for eco-based stimulus is big on rhetoric and short on detail. For instance, Rick Smith, executive director of Environmental Defence, one of the campaigns sponsoring organizations, called the package a æno-brainer that would combat both the recession and global warming: æThere are jobs just waiting to be created and businesses poised to grow. Really? Where? Much of the campaigns projections for new jobs and economic growth are based on magic-wand reasoning that imagines the only barrier between us and a post-industrial, green nirvana to be a lack of imagination and public funding. If we just throw enough federal cash at the problem, the theory goes, the dream of a carbon-free future will wondrously materialize. Its true that if Ottawa spent a few billion a year over the next five years " as envisioned by such a plan " reimbursing businesses for the cost of retrofitting their offices and plants to be more energy efficient in the process, there would be some temporary economic activity generated, some jobs, perhaps even a few new renovation businesses. But would the money necessarily produce economically sustainable industry, or merely provide a one-off cash transfer to businesses that happen to be well-positioned to exploit a fashionable cause? Most likely, as with any tax-funded, make-work project, the highest priority would be visibility and vote-winning. The money would go to those projects likeliest to produce the biggest publicity bang, rather than generate the most efficient economic return. Long-term, very little would be accomplished. Rather than let unions, eco-activists, left-wing economists and failed politicians decide where any stimulus package should go, the Conservative government would be well advised to lower taxes and remove burdensome regulations on all consumers and business. That way, millions of ordinary Canadians and hundreds of thousands of business will be unleashed to show the markets (and the innovators) where to go. If private actors want to use their cash to go after green dividends, good luck to them. If they dont, good luck to them equally. Either way, lets not let a set of four unsuccessful prime ministers " notable mainly for providing leadership Canadians didnt want " decide how to spend taxpayer money.

[Canada/US: A Godly Leader](#)When Stephen Harper was first elected Prime Minister, he began ending his speeches with the phrase æGod Bless Canada. As a result, Mr. Harper was attacked by Canadian leftists for mimicking George W. Bush, for injecting organized religion into Canadian public life and for offending Jews, Muslims and other faiths by emphasizing his Christianity. One Globe and Mail columnist derided Mr. Harpers God-talk as æsquirm-inducing. Other commentators wondered whether Mr. Harpers use of the æG word presaged Conservative assaults on gays, abortion and womens rights. (It didnt.) Fast forward two years. Are all those left-wing Canadian pundits now æsquirming at Barack Obama? In his inaugural address yesterday, the new U. S. President made several references to God. He quoted Scripture, referred to æthe God-given promise of equality and freedom, spoke of America progressing æwith eyes fixed on the horizon and Gods grace upon us and, of course, ended with the traditional æGod Bless America. We applaud this overt religiosity: What better way to encourage Americans public-spirited instincts than by appealing to the virtues preached by organized religion? But thats us " the Bible-(or Torah-) thumpers on the National Post editorial board. What about the Canadian liberals whose love-in

with Mr. Obama reached political climax yesterday? In recent weeks, the CBC in particular seems to have made itself over into a sort of all-Obama satellite station. Its executives were so overcome with ardour that they invited Canadians to nominate the top 49 songs from north of the 49th parallel that would best define our country. Following their heroes' shocking theocratic turn on inauguration day, will the CBC now edit the playlist to include ballads of betrayal? (We suggest No Doubts Don't Speak.) If not, we should all remember this the next time some Canadian uses the 'G' word in public. The worst that any Canadian will then be able to accuse them of is mimicking their hero, Barack Obama.

" Hat tip: Tuan Jim

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90% of Failed Asylum Seekers Remain in UK! And backlog of undecided cases doubles in a year As many as nine out of ten failed **asylum** seekers are being allowed to stay in Britain despite having no right to remain, a report from a Government watchdog reveals today. The backlog of illegal immigrants awaiting deportation is growing fast as the UK Border Agency fails to keep pace with the number of rejected applicants. The number of unprocessed cases is also growing. And Government rules stating that all successful **asylum** seekers must have their cases reviewed after five years " to see if their country is now safe enough to return to " have descended into farce, because the Border Agency has no way of tracking those living in Britain and no plans for a review.

" Hat tip: <http://snaphanen.dk/Steen>

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Barroso Urges EU Nations to Accept Guantanamo Prisoners European Commission chief Jose Manuel Barroso urged EU nations Friday to accept Guantanamo prisoners and help new US President Barack Obama close the war on terror jail in Cuba. "We must help our American friends resolve the problem, he said, adding that there are at least two countries, Spain and Portugal, which have made proposals in this direction. "I think the EU member states " of course it is their decision " could make an effort to help the United States, said Barroso, who is from Portugal [One of the leaders of the underground Maoist MRPP (Reorganising Movement of the Proletariat Party; later PCTP/MRPP-Communist Party of the Portuguese Workers/Revolutionary Movement of the Portuguese Proletariat; later later PM for the PPD/PSD-Social Democratic Party)]. EU foreign ministers, at a meeting in Brussels on Monday, are to debate the extent to which the European Union should coordinate a response to any demand from the United States to accept some of the 245 prisoners. Many of the 27 EU nations have called for the jail to be shut down, but each of them has their own legal systems and proceedings, so no over-arching EU **line** can be taken and imposed on all. [!] Some prisoners might have to be transferred to other countries, while others could yet be tried in US courts. Some may prove impossible to try, transfer or release. "How you actually deal with question of bring people back from Guantanamo is incredibly complex legally, one EU diplomat said Friday. While Portugal, backed by France, has been leading the drive to help close down the prison " a blight on Americas moral standing in the world over the last seven years " Austria ruled out Friday taking any prisoners in. Many others have yet to take a firm position.

" Hat tip: VH

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Czech Rep.: Czech Town Bans Extremist March Plzen " **The Plzen authorities have banned a march through the town that was announced for February 21 by a private organiser who presented it as a protest against occupation of Palestine, Hana Josefova, from the Plzen central district, said.** According to the organiser, up to 400 people would take part in the march. **However, police believe that it is an event organised by far-right radicals.** Since the Usti nad Labem Jewish community announced a meeting outside the local synagogue on the same day the officials proposed that the organiser change the route of the march. He, however, insisted on his original route and the march has therefore been banned, Josefova said.

" Hat tip: Tuan Jim

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Denmark: No Compensation for Cartoonists Death Plotter A Tunisian man will have to file a civil suit to be compensated for his time in custody while awaiting charges for allegedly plotting a murder. Police say they will not pay out compensation to a Tunisian who was one of two men charged with plotting to kill Mohammed cartoon artist Kurt Westergaard. Slim Chafra, who was jailed for 8 months last year while awaiting intelligence agency PETs gathering of information in the case, is seeking 600,000 kroner in compensation. The Supreme Court ruled in November that the Tunisian had been unjustly imprisoned as there was not sufficient evidence presented that he was a threat to society. Chafra is now on "tolerated stay status after being officially expelled from the country.

by the Immigration Ministry. He has not been sent back to Tunisia due to the risk of his facing possible torture from the countrys authorities. PET has refused to present its evidence to the court but believes Chafra to be the brains behind the planned assassination. B.T. newspaper indicated in November, however, that while there appeared to be a wealth of evidence implicating the other Tunisian charged for the crime, there was nothing to suggest Chafra was involved. The second Tunisian was also expelled from the country and voluntarily left Denmark last year. Police say that Chafra will have to file a civil suit if he wishes to get compensation for his time in custody.

" Hat tip: <http://snaphanen.dk/Steen>

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[Denmark: Rare Headscarf Appearance in Court](#) Three defence lawyers wore headscarves in court in protest over a parliamentary proposal to ban religious symbols in court. As parliament debates banning religious and political symbols in court, three defence lawyers appeared wearing headscarves in Næstved Court today. The controversial law change proposal from the Danish Peoples Party is getting its first hearing in parliament today. One of the three protestors was male lawyer, Janus Malcolm Petersen, who denied that their action was in contempt of court. "On the contrary, we think we are showing respect for the court with this action. We trust that the judges understand how they should be dressed in court, without having to introduce legislation about it, Pedersen told TV2 ??ST news. The judge in Næstved courthouse, Birgit Bjerring Andersen, ignored the head coverings of the three lawyers and impassively continued with the criminal case that was being heard by her.

" Hat tip: Tuan Jim

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[Denmark: Genital Mutilation Sentence " 2 Years](#) A mother of four has been sentenced to two years for allowing the genital mutilation of her daughters. Denmark's first case involving parents allowing the genital mutilation of their daughters resulted today in a two-year sentence for the mother. **The major part of the sentence " 1 year and six months " was conditional, while six months was unconditional. The Eritrean woman will not however have to serve a sentence in prison as she has already been in detention for four-and-a-half months.** Father freed While the mother was sentenced, the father of the girls was found not guilty. The mothers defence attorney said it had not yet been decided whether the mother would appeal her sentence as a matter of principle. **The important thing is that my client does not have to go to prison again. Two years sounds a lot, but we will now have to think about whether to appeal, says Attorney Jane Ranum.** **Third daughter Apart from the two daughters " now 10 and 12 years old " who had been genitally mutilated, the parents were also charged with planning to have a third daughter mutilated. Both were, however, found not guilty as charged with this latter offence.** **Both parents said they had not known that their daughters were to be mutilated. The mother explained in court that she had believed that her daughters were to be treated for a worm infection when her sister took them to a clinic.** Arrested The parents were arrested in the summer of 2008 when a pre-school teacher claimed to overhear a conversation in which the parents were said to be planning to travel to Sudan to have a now 6 year-old daughter genitally mutilated. The family father came to Denmark in 1991 as a political refugee. Originally from Eritrea, the parents had lived for several years in Sudan. Ban Female genital mutilation " sometimes termed circumcision " has been a criminal offence in Denmark since 2003.

" Hat tip: Tuan Jim

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[Dutch Courage by Mark Steyn](#) The Dutch, like the Canadians, think they can maintain social peace by shriveling the bounds of public discourse and bringing what little remains under state regulation. But one notices that the coercive urge, which comes so naturally to Euro-progressives, only goes in one direction. The Swedish Chancellor of Justice shuts down the investigation into the Grand Mosque of Stockholm for selling tapes urging believers to kill the brothers of pigs and apes (ie, Jews) because thats simply the everyday climate in the rhetoric. The masked men marching through the streets of London with placards threatening to rain down another 9/11 on the infidels are protected by a phalanx of Metropolitan Police officers. The PC nannies of the Canadian Human Rights Commission, happy to hound the last neo-Nazi in Saskatchewan posting to the Internet from his mums basement, wont go anywhere near Abou Hammaad Sulaiman Dameus al-Hayitia, the big-time Montreal imam whose book says infidels are evil people, Jews spread corruption and chaos, and homosexuals should be exterminated.

" Hat tip: JD

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[Editorial: Wilders Never-Ending Story](#) The appeals court in Amsterdam on Thursday issued a ruling which will echo for years and have major political implications. The court takes a hard **line** against the radical politician Geert Wilders and issued an extensively outlined order to charge Wilders with hate speech and inciting discrimination. That a lower court is now at liberty to give a dissenting verdict, after the appeals court has already ruled in such strong wording, is an illusion. The limits on freedom of speech for politicians have hereby been set. So for years to come, the courtroom will be the most important arena of debate about Muslims in the Netherlands. The focus will be on the criminal nature of Wilders statements first, and only second on their validity " or lack thereof. That is not anything to look forward to. Further escalation and polarisation are on the horizon. **NRC Handelsblad has stated before that the position of Muslims in the Netherlands is not so weak that the criminal justice system needs to protect them against Wilders. The open political debate offers enough space to put him in his place.** The European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg has approved curtailing offensive political statements in several European member states. But only if sanctions against such statements are proportional " usually very limited. If the Dutch penal code is to come into play here at any point, sanctions can therefor only be restricted. Otherwise they are deemed by Strasbourg to be illegal. **The grand words used by the Dutch court are disproportionate in that regard. The judges set themselves up as the protectors of the foundation of a stable democracy. These magistrates are rejecting not so much the offensive rhetoric used, but the very existence of Wilders populist right-wing party (PVV). However right the court may be regarding its characterisation of Wilders offending statements, his right to voice them remains of paramount importance.** The historical comparisons that the court draws with 1930s anti-semitism is likewise unfortunate. Undoubtedly the law against hate speech was introduced in that period with good intentions, out of concern for "poisoning the hearts and minds of the public. But that legislation created an adverse affect, rather than a positive one. The threat of that happening again is considerable. **The court considers Wilders comparisons between Islam and Nazism to be insulting to such a degree that freedom of speech should be limited. Yet why would it be acceptable to refer to Stalin or Pol Pot, but not to Hitler, in this debate? Is it because Hitler occupied the Netherlands? And that everyone who is compared to him is automatically considered a traitor? That is indeed insulting. Yet outside the realm of national history, this use of exceptions is indefensible. The Dutch courts have set themselves up for a long and unproductive debate, reminiscent of "The People vs. Larry Flint. This time not on porn but on politics. The prosecution of Wilders might therefore be the beginning of a never-ending story.**

" Hat tip: Tuan Jim

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[EU Expected to Strike Iranian Opposition From Terror List](#) The European Union is expected to strike the main Iranian opposition group in exile off its list of terrorist organisations on Monday, EU officials said. A decision by EU foreign ministers to drop the group, the Peoples Mujahedeen of Iran [PMOI, a militant Islamic Socialist terrorist organization, also known as Mojahedin-e-Khalq, MEK], from its terror blacklist would bring to an end a long legal battle. The Luxembourg-based Court of First Instance ruled last month that the EU had wrongly frozen the funds of the opposition group and violated its rights by not justifying why it was placed on the list. It was the third such ruling by Europes second-highest tribunal. According to a draft document seen by AFP Friday, the EU will adopt a new blacklist " a move which is necessary each semester " as the current one expires next month. But it will also say: "Following the judgement of the Court of First Instance! (PMOI) has not been included in the lists of persons, groups and entities. Founded in 1965 with the aim of replacing first the shah and then the clerical regime in Iran, the PMOI " now led by exiled Iran opposition figure Maryam Rajavi " has in the past operated an armed group inside Iran. It was the armed wing of the France-based National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI) but it renounced violence in June 2001. In a statement, Rajavi, who lives freely in France, expressed hope that the "EU council avoids appeasement of the mullahs regime, abides by court ruling, and officially announces removal of PMOI from the terror list. Over the last weeks, PMOI supporters have held regular rallies outside the European Council building in Brussels where the talks will take place. The EU decision will come as a so-called "A point at Mondays meeting. "A points are usually rubber-stamped without discussion as the details have already been ironed out by ambassadors, but nations could still raise objections. "Technically, any member state can pop up at the last moment and say, actually we have a problem with this A point. It is within the rules of procedure to do that, an EU diplomat explained. But in Paris, a foreign ministry spokesman warned that France had appealed against the court ruling. "France considers that the listing of PMOI complies with the law, thats why it has appealed against the decision of this tribunal, spokesman Frederic Desagneaux said. Iran has condemned the ruling and is likely to complain should the EU drop the PMOI from its list. "What we have seen is a completely political ruling which

lacks any legal basis, foreign ministry spokesman Hassan Ghashghavi said after it was handed down on December 4. "Nothing has changed in the terrorist nature of this group. They are the same people with the same ideology. Any move to drop the group would also increase pressure on the United States, which banned the PMOI as a foreign terrorist organization in 2003.

" Hat tip: VH

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[EU: Nuclear Smuggling Suspect Says He Helped CIA](#) Swiss man says he tipped off Pakistan scientists shipment to Libya GENEVA " A Swiss man suspected of being involved in the worlds biggest nuclear smuggling ring claims he supplied the CIA with information that led to the breakup of the black market nuclear network led by Pakistani scientist Abdul Qadeer Khan. In a documentary airing Thursday on Swiss TV station SF1, Urs Tinner says he tipped off U.S. intelligence about a delivery of centrifuge parts meant for Libyas nuclear weapons program. The shipment was seized at the Italian port of Taranto in 2003, forcing Libya to admit and eventually renounce its efforts to acquire nuclear weapons. The 43-year-old Tinner is suspected, along with his brother Marco and father Friedrich, of supplying Khans clandestine network with technical know-how and equipment that was used to make gas centrifuges. Khan " the creator of Pakistans atomic bomb " sold the centrifuges for secret nuclear weapons programs in countries that included Libya and Iran before his operation was disrupted in 2003. Tinner was freed by Swiss authorities last month after almost five years in investigative detention and he has yet to be charged. [.] Urs Tinner is waiting to see whether prosecutors will file charges against him for breaking Swiss laws on the export of sensitive material " a crime that carries a penalty of up to 10 years imprisonment. The federal criminal court in Bellinzona on Thursday ordered Marco Tinner released on a bail of \$87,000, rejecting an appeal by prosecutors to keep him in prison pending a possible trial. Swiss weekly NZZ am Sonntag reported last month that prosecutors objected to Marco Tinner's release because of concerns he might still possess sensitive information on the construction of nuclear bombs.

" Hat tip: JD

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[Gaza: EU: Open Passes; Livni: Stop Iranian Arms to Hamas](#) (by Marisa Ostolani) (ANSAmEd) BRUSSELS, JANUARY 21 " A strong but wary appeal which was launched at Israel by EUs foreign ministers, that it reopen the passes leading into Gaza "immediately, has been met with a luke-warm response from Israels foreign minister, Tipzi Livni, who preferred to insist on the necessity of blocking the flow of illegal arms being supplied to Hamas, especially from Iran. The meeting in Brussels yesterday of the EU foreign ministers with their Israeli colleague was called by the Czech presidency as a contribution to diplomatic efforts to find a solution to the Gaza conflict. A further extraordinary meeting of the 27 EU foreign ministers alongside their counterparts from Jordan, Egypt, Turkey and PNA leader Mahmoud Abbas has been scheduled for Sunday evening. "We have asked Israel to allow the immediate unblocking of the entry points to Gaza to allow the distribution of aid Czech foreign minister Karel Schwarzenberg said. "We received an assurance from Ms Livni that for its part Israel will do everything possible to permit effective humanitarian aid to Gaza. But there was no definite undertaking about the opening of the passes, which were effectively closed by Israel following Hamas electoral victory and is the issue on which the EU is insisting. "We are willing to cooperate on the humanitarian question Livni stated. "But to talk about an enduring and stable peace also entails blocking the traffic of arms towards Gaza and Hamas which is coming from Iran especially, the Israeli minister insisted. For the EUs part the messages sent out were unequivocal: "Without a return to normal life, the Gaza situation will blow up again warned Karl Bildt, Swedens foreign minister. "Israel has to understand that you cant leave Gaza imprisoned: without open borders the Strip takes on explosive potential, Jean Asselborn, Luxembourgs foreign minister joined in. The same point was made by the High Representative for Foreign Affairs, Javier Solana and Commissioner for External Relations, Benita Ferrero-Waldner. On the political analysis front, the voice of Finlands foreign minister, Alexander Stubb, was not part of the chorus, saying that a global solution is impossible without Hamas. "We have to start reflecting on how to get all sides around the negotiating table, Stubb said. "There is no possibility of have a permanent peace unless everyone is around the same table. But it wont happen soon. It will take time. There was a clear no-go on this point from Livni, according to whom Hamas can play no part in the solution being sought between Israelis and Palestinians. " Hamas defends the logic of hatred and terrorism. We are fighting terrorism, not the Palestinians, Livni stated. From the Israeli minister, whose arrival in Brussels was the target of a protest by a group of Palestinians in front of the Council, there came a impassioned defence of the Israeli army which, she said, "fights while respecting international values and laws. (ANSAmEd)

" Hat tip: Insubria

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[Iceland: Prime Minister Steps Down Amid Violent Protests](#)Icelandic Prime Minister Geir Haarde on Friday called early elections following violent protests on the streets of Reykjavik. Meanwhile, Europes top politicians are on edge following clashes in Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary and Greece.Icelandic Prime Minister Geir Haarde, rattled by the financial crisis and widespread anti-government protests, called early national elections for May 9 on Friday and announced he was stepping down.Haarde, 57, said he would not seek re-election because he has a throat tumor. The new timetable brings forward elections which were due in 2011.Iceland, the epicenter of the banking crisis, saw huge debts toppling its banks last autumn. Its fragile economy is expected to contract by 10 percent this year. Faced with rocketing unemployment and rising inflation, Icelanders have increasingly taken to the streets to voice their anger.Tensions in Reykjavik peaked on Thursday night when police used tear gas to control rioters for the first time since 1949. Demonstrators say the ruling Independence Party have brought financial ruin to a once wealthy island. In recent days, crowds of 2,000 " from a population of 320,000 " have gathered in front of the parliament to rail against the government.Polls suggest a new election would likely spell a swing to the left with the Left-green party profiting from the tide of anti-capitalist sentiment.Icelanders havent been the only ones in Europe taking to the streets to voice their disgust at worsening economic conditions. People in Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary and Greece have likewise been voicing their frustration!

" Hat tip: Tuan Jim

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[Italy: No More Demonstrations at Places of Worship](#)**Call for directive to prevent episodes like Duomo demonstration in Milan from happening again**ROME " Places of worship, supermarkets and shopping malls will join public institutions, political party headquarters and diplomatic premises as being off-limits for demonstrators. Organisers will also have to pay a deposit as a guarantee against damage.NEW RULES " Interior minister Roberto Maroni has proposed new rules for public demonstrations, revealing that he is working on a directive to be sent to prefects and chiefs of police. A week ago, the minister explained to a hearing of the Senates constitutional affairs committee why there was a need to review public order regulations for events that attract thousands of people into the streets. He made specific reference to the prayers by hundreds of Muslims in Milans Piazza Duomo during the pro-Gaza march. He said: æDemonstrations like the recent ones for Palestine pose new questions with respect to what we were used to. In the past, we prevented marches from passing various kinds of premises, including those of political parties. Its now time to assess whether marches should pass places of worship. Mr Maroni added that æthere is no wish to offer a repressive response but it is necessary to give full implementation both to the right to demonstrate and to the right of non-demonstrators to use their own town.NO MORE DUOMO INCIDENTS " The proposal was reiterated at question time in the Lower Chamber when Mr Maroni replied to a question by Riccardo De Corato, the deputy mayor of Milan, who wanted to know what initiatives the minister was taking to prevent similar situations in future. Mr Maroni replied: æI have drafted a directive so that episodes like the demonstration outside the Duomo in Milan will not happen again. The draft under consideration will give prefects clear instructions to deny demonstrations access to specific areas, such as places of worship above all, but also shopping malls, supermarkets, monuments and sites of public interest. Meanwhile in Rome, the mayor, prefect and trade unions are already working on a project to exclude demonstrations from the city centre and reduce the consequent disruption. The rules, however, will not be hard and fast. Assessments will be made case by case and specific precedents will be taken into account when authorisation is granted for routes indicated by demonstrators. The directive is expected to include further measures, such as sureties against damage. The current proposal requires the organisers of demonstrations to make a deposit which would not be returned if any damage was caused during the march. The aim of the measure is to encourage organisers themselves to isolate the violent extremists who often hide among other demonstrators.English translation by Giles Watson www.watson.it

" Hat tip: C. Cantoni

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[Italy to Build New Jails](#)**Scheme will ease overcrowding, govt says**(ANSA) " Rome, January 23 " The Italian government on Friday launched plans to build new prisons and end chronic overcrowding.??We dont have much time or money!but we aim to bring the jail system up to date, said Justice Minister Angelino Alfano.A recently appointed special commissioner for jails, Franco Ionta, will be given ??extraordinary powers to accelerate the jail-building programme, Alfano said.The scheme is aimed at raising the official jail capacity above 60,000, the number of current inmates.At present Italian jail capacity is 43,000, but the number of prisoners being held is 15,000 higher

at 58,000. The new prisons will be built with the participation of private companies so as to ensure they will be ready in a matter of months, he said. Alfano did not go into much detail apart from saying the jails would be built all over Italy and would be smaller than current jails. They don't have to be 19th-century-style fortresses, he said. The scheme was inserted into a bill due for approval by the end of March. Prison rights group Antigone criticised the ministers plan, saying "a prison has never been built in six months in Italy. It said a thousand new prisoners went into jail each month and predicted that even with new prisons the system would be unable to cope. Non-custodial sentences for many categories of prisoners would be a better way of easing overcrowding quickly, Antigone said. The government should **stop** stuffing jails with prostitutes, consumers of soft drugs and illegal immigrants whose only crime is not having papers. Other experts said alternatives to jail like electronic tagging would help. Prison warders have repeatedly complained about conditions in Italian jails. Last month warders union Osapp warned the situation could only get worse. Prisons are in a pitiful state, even newly built ones, and paradoxically there is a risk of overcrowding even in the maximum security areas where detainees are supposed to be held in isolation, it said. Osapp accused Alfano of dragging his feet on the issue and not presenting "a concrete plan for investments. The minister has ruled out any mass prisoner pardons, like one ordered by the last government two years ago to ease prisoner overcrowding. The pardon, approved in May 2006 by the then new centre-left government with support from some centre-right parties, knocked three years off sentences and led to the release of almost 27,000 inmates. Some 20% of those released have since been re-arrested for committing fresh crimes, and prisons are once again over capacity. The pardon controversially covered all crimes committed before May 2, 2006, making it applicable to past, present and future sentences.

" Hat tip: Insubria

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[Italy: Talks of Deportations](#) Italy one of the few Western countries that is actually fighting back against the domestic threat of Islam is showing us once again that are willing to do what ever is necessary to save their country from an Islamic take over.

" Hat tip: <http://islaminaction08.blogspot.com/islam> in Action

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[Liberazione: Folena, Privatisation Not Scandalous](#) (AGI) " Rom, 7 Jan. " In 2000-01, privatisation began of the DS newspaper "Unita in a sales crisis, first under the direction of Furio Colombo and then under that of Antonio Padellaro: it is not negative or scandalous that the same path that I consider reasonable, happens today for "Liberazione. Speaking, Pietro Folena, the ex-coordinator of the DS and then leader of "United on the Left, who then went on to be a part of the "European Left, created by Fausto Bertinotti. "I think that it is correct and reasonable, Ferreros project to remove the party from the newspaper in crisis " Folena explains " What I found very unpleasant were the heated voices above the **lines**: a sign of unequivocal immaturity that there is on the Left and that it is time to put an end to it once and for all. A process of "privatisation brings hard choices. "Surely, if "Unita is alive today, it exists, it is in the newsstands " Folena warns " it is thanks to the painful but indispensable operation in 2000: for a time we did not go to the newsstands before returning in the spring of 2001. A painful choice is for example a change in direction. "I am very sorry " continues Folena " for Piero Sansonetti, who I consider a valid professional, but in the face of these losses, I don't consider it negative or scandalous Ferreros project: I would like " he continues " that he focuses more on the construction of a new left, plural, federal and able to compete. Doesn't this exist without fragmentation and schisms? "Making other un-influential parties is absolutely useless, he concludes.

" Hat tip: Insubria

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[Obamas Web Team in UK Racism Fight](#) The web strategists behind Barack Obamas successful presidential campaign are throwing their weight behind a UK campaign to counter racism and fascism. Blue State Digital (BSD) will work with the Hope Not Hate campaign to build up grassroots support over the internet. In particular, it is attempting to **stop** the BNP winning a seat in the European election and has already invited thousands of people to join the campaign online. by Chloe Markowicz, PR Week UK 21-Jan-09, 16:14 The web strategists behind Barack Obamas successful presidential campaign are throwing their weight behind a UK campaign to counter racism and fascism. Blue State Digital (BSD) will work with the Hope Not Hate campaign to build up grassroots support over the internet. In particular, it is attempting to **stop** the BNP winning a seat in the European election and has already invited thousands of people to join the campaign online. Hope Not Hate was founded by Searchlight, the anti-British National Party organisation. BSD, which has offices in New York, Washington and Boston, opened a London office

in December 2008. London director Matthew McGregor said: "BSD will be working closely with Searchlight, developing messaging, email and fundraising campaigns to help supporters organise and mobilise" and then fight back against the BNPs message of racism, intolerance and hate. Mark Hanson, senior consultant at Staniforth and Labour Party strategist, said: "We are seeing a lot of groups trying or claiming to adopt Obama techniques but I am impressed by Hope Not Hate. It has grasped that building support is about reaching people who have a network of friends who will act if asked to." It is then crafting the appeal and transmitting the request in a powerful way as opposed to getting hold of a huge email list and broadcasting at them. BSD mastered that art in the US election and the Hope Not Hate appeal is good in that it is a simple ask and a very powerful one.

" Hat tip: VH

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[Spain: EU, Unemployment Rate in 2010 19%](#)(ANSAméd) " MADRID, JANUARY 19 " Government forecasts are still darker than expected for the economic scenario released by the European Commission, which foresees for 2009 a drop in GDP of 2%, together with a peak in unemployment. Sources from the Executive Branch, quoted by agencies, assure that the unemployment rate in Spain will be the highest in the EU and will be double the European average. The Commissions forecast are worse than those announced on Friday by the Economic Minister Pedro Solbes, who forewarned an economic slowdown for 2009 of 1.6%, but with GDP growth in 2010 at 1.2%. Concerning unemployment, the Spanish government predicts that this year it may well go over 15.9%, while the same figure from Brussels states 16.1% in 2009 and 18.7% in 2010. The Spanish public deficit, according to the EU Commissioner, Joaquín Almunia, already reached 3.4% of GDP in 2008 and will reach 6.2% in the year in progress as a consequence of unemployment benefits and financial relief measures adopted by the government last November and the 8 billion directed at the cities, equal to 1.1% of GDP. (ANSAméd).

" Hat tip: Insubria

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[Spain: One in Two Spanish Does Not Speak Foreign Languages](#)(ANSAméd) " MADRID, JULY 28 " One in two Spanish speaks only one language, Castilian, while in some regions of Castile-La Mancha the percentage of citizens who do not speak foreign languages rises to 67%, according to the results of a study by the Foundation of Savings Banks (Funcas), published on the latest issue of Economic Information Notebooks. Despite the fact that the knowledge of foreign languages is a necessity, almost half of the Spanish people, 49.7%, admit to ignore them completely. In particular, 64.4% of Andalusians residents, 63.7% of Cantabrians residents, 47.4% of Galicians residents, 42.3% of Madrids residents; the percentage decreases for the inhabitants of Catalonia (23.7%) and the Balearic islands (24.6%). Above average, in terms of knowledge of languages other than Spanish, also the residents of Valencia (51.1%), Navarre (51.4%), the Basque Country (55.6%) and Aragon (55.7%). The income per capita and the coexistence of the two official languages in the community are the two factors which have the greatest influence in the disparity in the knowledge of foreign languages. Therefore, Castile-La-Mancha, Andalusia and Extremadura, with lower incomes per capita, have the largest number of people who do not speak foreign languages. The survey, carried out on the basis of a questionnaire handed out to 2,489 people above 28 years of age, points out also that the education system has not corrected the barriers of insufficient and ineffective tuition of foreign languages. The results of a research conducted by the Statistical Institute of Catalonia, show that the third most spoken language in the region, after Spanish and Catalanian, is Amazig or Berber language, originating from northern Africa. It was calculated that out of the some 20 million people who still speak this language worldwide, 100,000 live in Catalonia.(ANSAméd).

" Hat tip: Insubria

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[UK/India: UK a Sanctuary for Jihadists](#) It is not surprising that British Foreign Secretary David Miliband should have so crassly sought to provide legitimacy to the Lashkar-e-Tayyeba and Pakistani terrorists by linking the Mumbai terror attack to the "Kashmir issue. Britain plays host to Islamist terrorists and Labour uses their votes to win elections. There has been considerable anger and indignation in India over the attempt of Mr David Miliband, the British Foreign Secretary, who visited India last week, to rationalise the terrorist attack on Mumbai by the Lashkar-e-Tayyeba of Pakistan by linking the attack to the "Kashmir issue. None of the indigenous Kashmiri organisations has linked the Mumbai attack to Jammu & Kashmir. Yet Mr Miliband sought to provide legitimacy to the LeTs terrorist attack by linking it to the "Kashmir issue, disregarding the fact that the attack, as seen from the brutal murder of nine Jewish and 12 nationals of Western countries, which have contributed forces to the Nato contingent in Afghanistan, was part of the global jihadi agenda unrelated to either Jammu & Kashmir or the grievances of the

Indian Muslims. The shocking attempt by Mr Miliband to play down the murder of 138 Indians and 25 foreign nationals committed by the Pakistani terrorists should not have come as a surprise to those aware of the historic links of the British intelligence with the Mirpuri migrants from Pakistani-occupied Kashmir in the UK and their important role during elections in certain constituencies which traditionally return Labour candidates to the House of Commons with the support of the Mirpuri vote-bank. After Pakistan and Afghanistan, the UK has been traditionally the largest sanctuary to foreign terrorists and extremists. Everybody, who is somebody in the world of terrorism, has found a rear base in the UK " the Khalistanis in the past, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, the Mirpuris from Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, the Chechens, the Al Muhajiroun, the Hizbut Tehrir etc. Having allowed such a medley of terrorists and extremists to operate unchecked from their territory for so long, the British intelligence just does not have a correct estimate of how many sleeper cells are operating from their country and of which organisations. Since persons of Pakistani origin have been playing an increasingly active role in promoting the activities of Al Qaeda, it is necessary to analyse the nature of migration from Pakistan to the UK and the US. Muslims from Pakistan constitute the single largest Muslim migrant group from the sub-continent in both the UK and the US " followed by Indian and Bangladeshi Muslims. There are estimated to be about 7,00,000 Muslims of Pakistani origin in the UK. No estimate is available in respect of the US. The largest migrant group from Pakistan in the UK are Punjabi-speaking Muslims " from Pakistani Punjab as well as from the PoK. The migrants from the PoK are called Mirpuris. They are not ethnic Kashmiris, but Punjabi-speaking migrants from the Pakistani Punjab, whose families had settled down in the Mirpur area of the PoK for generations. They were essentially small farmers and landless labourers, who lost their livelihood as a result of the construction of the Mangla dam. They, therefore, migrated to West Europe " the largest number to the UK and a smaller number to France, Germany and the Scandinavian countries. Many of them preferred to go to the UK because it already had a large Punjabi-speaking community from Pakistani Punjab. The initial Mirpuri migrants, who hardly spoke English, felt themselves comfortable in a Punjabi-speaking environment. As the number of Muslims of Pakistani origin in the UK increased, mosques came up to cater to their religious needs. Till 1977, these mosques were headed by clerics from the more tolerant Barelvi Sunni sect. When Gen Zia-ul-Haq, a devout Deobandi, captured power in Pakistan in 1977, he embarked on a policy of marginalising the influence of Barelvi clerics not only in Pakistan, but also in Europe and increasing the influence of the rabid Deobandis. He inducted Deobandis into the Education Department as Arab teachers and into the armed forces to cater to the religious needs of the military personnel. He encouraged and helped the Deobandis to take over the mosques in Pakistan and in the UK by replacing the Barelvis. With the induction of an increasing number of Deobandis started the process of the Arabisation/Wahabisation of the Muslims in Pakistan and of the Pakistani diaspora in the UK. The intelligence agencies of the US and the UK went along with Zias policy of Arabising/Wahabising the Muslims of Pakistan because this contributed to an increase in the flow of jihadi terrorists to fight against the Soviet troops in Afghanistan. Till 1983, the members of the Pakistani diaspora in the UK were considered a largely law-abiding people. The first signs of the radicalisation of the diaspora appeared in 1983 when a group of jihadi terrorists kidnapped Ravi Mhatre, an Indian diplomat posted in the Indian Assistant High Commission in Birmingham, and demanded the release of Maqbool Butt, the leader of the Jammu & Kashmir Liberation Front, who was then awaiting execution in the Tihar Jail in Delhi following his conviction on charges of murder. When the Government of India rejected their demand, the terrorists killed Mhatre and threw his dead body into one of the streets. This kidnapping and murder was allegedly orchestrated by Amanullah Khan, a Gilgiti from Pakistan. He was assisted by some Mirpuris of the Pakistani diaspora. The British were uncooperative with India in the investigation of this case and declined to hand over those involved in the kidnapping and murder to India for investigation and prosecution. By closing their eyes to the terrorist activities of the Mirpuris from their territory, they encouraged the further radicalisation of the diaspora. Just as the radicalisation of the Muslims of Pakistan suited the US-UK agenda in Afghanistan, the radicalisation of the diaspora in the UK, particularly the Mirpuris, suited their agenda for balkanising Yugoslavia in the 1990s. Many Pakistanis from the UK went to the training camps of the Harkat-ul-Ansar (now called the Harkat-ul-Mujahideen) and the LeT in Pakistan and got themselves trained with the knowledge and complicity of the British. They then went to Bosnia and Kosovo to wage a jihad against the Serbs with arms and ammunition and explosives allegedly supplied by the Iranian intelligence with the tacit consent of the Clinton Administration and paid for by Saudi intelligence.

" Hat tip: Tuan Jim

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[UK: 80 Foreign Murderers Welcomed to Britain!](#) **Albanian killers allowed to stay despite being on Interpol ~wanted list** Eighty foreign killers are exploiting the chaotic asylum system to set up home in Britain, it was

revealed yesterday. The convicted murderers from Albania have been given British passports despite being officially listed as "wanted by Interpol." Most slipped across the Channel from Calais to Dover hidden in the back of lorries on ferries. They used bogus names and false papers to claim asylum, often pretending to be from the war-torn Balkan republic of Kosovo. The scandal came to light when Albania's chief of police complained that 100 criminals from his country have been granted British citizenship and now live here. The police chief said the criminals have been allowed to stay even though the Albanian government has informed the Home Office of the true identities of the men and their crimes, which also include rape and robbery. Many of the convicted criminals have been living in the UK for up to ten years and have started new families here. As the revelations exposed the shambles within the asylum system yet again, campaigners expressed their outrage. Sir Andrew Green, of MigrationWatch, said: "It is a real concern that people accused of, or even convicted of, very serious crimes should apparently find it so easy to gain asylum in Britain. Rose Dixon, of victim group Support After Murder and Manslaughter, added: "I'm astounded. If this is correct, I'm appalled that these people are walking the streets of Britain. I think we should be told a lot more about this. After the Home Office was informed about the true identity of the asylum seekers, extradition proceedings against them were lodged by the Albanian Government. But complex legal arguments and the need to find interpreters and psychologists has led to lengthy delays. Albanian criminals use myriad loopholes in the extradition laws to avoid being sent home. Their lawyers often claim they will suffer human rights abuse on their return, or that trials in their absence were unfair because they could not give their side. The situation is even more complicated if they have become British citizens. Under the Human Rights Act 1988, this gives them further protection against being removed because their family life would be disrupted. Even when a case does finally go through a British court, it is the Home Secretary who decides the fate of the asylum seeker. Meanwhile, many continue to live off state hand-outs while others have gone on to commit crimes in Britain. **Ahmet Prenci, the Albanian chief of police, said he felt as if all his forces hard work in tracking down the culprits had been in vain. "We have made a list of our people who are hiding in the UK, he said. "There are 100 criminals, and more than 80 per cent are wanted for murder and have been convicted in absentia. "They have been given British citizenship despite our efforts to extradite them to serve prison sentences in our country. "We are working intensively to identify, locate, and then to arrest wanted Albanian people in Britain. Unfortunately, many have British passports obtained after they claimed asylum by pretending to be Kosovans. "We are unhappy that the courts repeatedly refuse extradition of these criminals. There is no reason for an Albanian citizen who has been involved in a crime not to be punished.** Mr Prenci spoke out as a report by the National Audit Office revealed that Britain is struggling to cope with the growing numbers of asylum seekers. The UK Border Agency is overwhelmed with cases. More than 300,000 asylum claims have not been processed and nine out of ten foreigners refused asylum are not sent home. Chris Grayling, Shadow Home Secretary, said: "The Home Office has consistently been warned about undesirables entering our country both legally and illegally, yet they seem not to have a grip on it. While the Home Office is prepared to do nothing about this, we will introduce a dedicated UK police force to secure our borders. A Home Office spokesman last night refused to respond to the Albanian police chiefs allegations that criminals from his country were being given British citizenship even though their past was known. He said: "We cannot comment on individual extradition cases.

" Hat tip: Tuan Jim

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[UK: Backlog of Asylum Cases Doubles](#) The backlog of asylum cases more than doubled over a year to 8,700 by mid-2008, a government watchdog says. In a critical report, the National Audit Office says the Home Office has also failed to deliver an increase in removals of failed asylum seekers. It praised a major reform of the asylum system, but said 450,000 unresolved legacy cases had cost the taxpayer £600m over the past year. The UK Border Agency said the NAO had recognised considerable successes. Home Office chiefs introduced the New Asylum Model (Nam) two years ago to speed up and improve decision making. It means a single official deals with an applicant's case from start to finish. "Sudden changes The National Audit Office report broadly praised Nam, saying it recognised the challenges posed by asylum applications. It said the UK Border Agency had increased the proportion of cases dealt with in under six months and the quality of decisions was improving. But it said the system could not cope with sudden changes in demand and the backlog of undecided cases had more than doubled to 8,700 during the second quarter of 2008, compared with the same period in 2007. A quarter of all applicants were not having a vital full-screening interview early enough, it said. The report criticised a second backlog of unresolved asylum applications under the old system " totalling up to 450,000 in June 2006 but down to 245,000 by last summer. These are thought to have cost the taxpayer £600m in the last financial year. The report said all of this was

exacerbated by too few secure detention and removal facilities. The Home Office's decision to prioritise removing foreign national prisoners had also hit asylum targets. Tim Burr, head of the National Audit Office, said: "The system is not yet working as it should for every case." The UK Border Agency has to be sharper in gathering all relevant information as early as possible, translating it into good decisions and then speedily enforcing those decisions. "There is a risk that a new backlog of unresolved cases will be created, adding to the existing backlog of 'legacy' cases." Detention plans Lin Homer, head of the UK Border Agency, said many NAO recommendations had already been acted upon. New detention facilities were in the pipeline, she said. "This report recognises the considerable success we have had in improving the asylum system." It acknowledges that we have an improved grip on asylum applications. We are strengthening our checks on decision making, recruiting more staff and are committed to conclude 90% of new asylum cases within six months by 2011. Donna Covey, of the Refugee Council, said: "We have first-hand experience of the problems with the current system, from case owners not being present all the way through the process, through to people not being able to access legal advice before their main interview." Edward Leigh MP, chairman of the Commons public accounts committee, said he would not bet on the backlog target being met. "When you get down to brass tacks, the UK Border Agency is struggling to cope, even with its new programme." Not the least frustrating aspect is that, because of a continuing lack of detention space, failed applicants often disappear.

" Hat tip: Tuan Jim

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UK: Is This the Man Who Sold Barclays Down the River? **by Chris Blackhurst** BACK in November, there was much cause for celebration inside Barclays. Roger Jenkins, the former international athlete turned the banks Middle East fixer, and Amanda Staveley, the ex-model and now a financial power-broker with the Middle Eastern Gulf rulers, had concluded a remarkable deal. While Barclays' main British rivals, Royal Bank of Scotland, HBOS and Lloyds TSB, were forced to go begging to the British Government for assistance, the bank had persuaded the royal families of Abu Dhabi and Qatar, and the sovereign wealth fund of Qatar, to stump up £7 billion. It was a triumph for Staveley. The former girlfriend of Prince Andrew collected £40 million for brokering the coup. Internally, at Barclays, there were congratulations, too, for Jenkins and for John Varley, Barclays CEO. For Varley, the injection of Arab cash at such a difficult time in the markets was a personal vindication. A dry, somewhat ascetic figure, connected by marriage to one of the Quaker families that played a part in Barclays' rise, he had always had to work that bit harder to prove himself to a sceptical City. The comparison was forever being made between Varley, who looks like an English country parson and talks in hushed tones, and the go-getting American, Bob Diamond, who runs Barclays' investment banking side. Repeated reports of the perceived rivalry between the pair "denied by them both" continually niggled. This shock Arab support was a victory for Varley, throwing up the possibility of Barclays forming strategic relationships in the richest region of the world. It was a slap in the face for the bank's competitors, for the Government that was trying to bring its own influence to bear on Barclays, and to Varley's critics. Almost three months later and Barclays shares are at their lowest level since 1985. For days now, the shares have been falling. Speculation is rife in the City that the bank, which did not require an injection of government capital, may now have to swallow its pride and seek help. But for Varley and his colleagues, there is a worse realisation. Under the terms of the Arab injection, they are in danger of ceding control of the bank to their new Gulf friends. In return for their money, Sheikh Mansour Bin Zayed Al Nahyan from Abu Dhabi and his coinvestors received convertible notes, which are exchanged for shares. They agreed to wait seven months for conversion to shares at a price of 153p. However, if at any time before 30 June, Barclays raises more money at a lower price, the Arabs can exchange their notes. As Barclays shares have since slumped to 66p, they could almost triple their holding "which would give them around 55 per cent of the British bank."

" Hat tip: Gaia

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UK: John Hutton "Deceived MPs Over Navy Cuts" John Hutton has been accused of deceiving Parliament over his explanation for a two-year delay in the Royal Navy's aircraft carrier programme. The allegation came after Lockheed Martin, the American defence company, contradicted his account. He had said that the delay was linked to a later delivery date for the aircraft that the vessels will carry. In a written Commons statement last month, the Defence Secretary said that construction of the 65,000-tonne HMS Queen Elizabeth and her sister ship, HMS Prince of Wales, would be put back a further one or two years in line with the expected delivery of the Joint Strike Fighter, the combat aircraft designed to replace the Harrier. The fighter project has been running behind schedule. Under the delayed in-service dates announced for the two carriers, HMS Queen Elizabeth, which was to

have been ready by 2014, will now be completed by 2015 or 2016, and HMS Prince of Wales will not be in service until 2016 or 2017. Lockheed Martin, however, confirmed to The Times that it had been ready to provide the combat aircraft by 2014 but had been told by the Ministry of Defence to deliver in time for a 2017 initial operating capability. The company, which is developing the Joint Strike Fighter in partnership with BAE Systems, said that the aircrafts assembly line was already running and that other partners in the programme would get their aircraft before Britain. It emphasised that deliveries to the MoD would start well before 2017 to allow the Royal Navy to build up operational capability before the in-service date. It's true that the MoD wanted its JSF initial operating capability for 2017, although we told them we could deliver by 2014, the company said. Australia would have initial operating capability for the fighters in 2015, the Netherlands in 2016 and Britain and Turkey in 2017, Lockheed Martin said. Those ordered by the US Marine Corps would be operational by 2012. Liam Fox, the Shadow Defence Secretary, who recently visited Lockheed Martins factory in Fort Worth, Texas, where he was told of the aircrafts production schedule, said that the only reason for delaying the carriers was to save money. I think the statement made in the Commons last month [by Mr Hutton] was designed to deceive, Dr Fox said. Although Mr Hutton gave no time-scale for the delivery of the Joint Strike Fighters, the implication of his statement was that Lockheed Martin was unable to provide the aircraft by 2014. Last months announcement that the in-service date for the two carriers was to be delayed was part of a package of cutbacks that included the postponement of elements of the Armys new generation of armoured vehicles, known as FRES (Future Rapid Effect System). In a Commons written answer ten days ago, Quentin Davies, the Minister for Defence Equipment and Support, rejected the allegation that the delay in the carrier programme amounted to a cut. What we have done is to align better the in-service date of the two carriers with the in-service date of the new JSF aircraft designed to fly off them, he said. The MoD said that it did not recognise the time-scale of 2017 for the fighters. We have not specifically asked for a 2017 delivery date, a spokeswoman said, adding that a decision would be made next month about receiving three fighters for testing purposes. Each aircraft will cost between £60 million and £65 million. The MoD insisted that the delay in the carrier programme would not add to the cost of the order. The MoD is expected to place an order for up to 150 Joint Strike Fighters at a cost of about £12 billion. The development programme has cost £2 billion.

" Hat tip: Tuan Jim

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[UK: Smear Campaign Against the British National Party](#) Anyone reading African Crisis knows about the British National Party and how it is the only party committed to save Britain by stopping immigration, withdrawing the UK from the European Union, ending political correctness and multiculturalism and abolishing all the anti-racism laws that are de-facto a way to end freedom of speech and make native Britons second class citizens in their country. It's not surprising that the political elite is trying to stop the BNP by using any mean, legal and illegal, especially now that is on the verge of achieving historic breakthroughs. So there is something strange going on.. In one local paper, in an article about an arson attack on a synagogue in north London, a group called Jews for justice for Palestinians, in an interview claims that the BNP could have been responsible, even if in another article of the same newspaper, it reports that police suspect some young Asians. Then in another local paper someone from a group against Islamophobia, in a letter to that newspaper, claim that an unspecified MP told him that the BNP is committing acts of crime against the Jewish community in order to stir tension between Jews and Muslims. Now I'm the only one here to see a smear campaign aimed at blaming the BNP for rising antisemitism, even if anyone knows that antisemitic attacks are committed by Muslims? DO you think this is a conspiracy carried out by the secret services? I would like your opinion. Posted By: Giuseppe

" Hat tip: VH

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[UK: Schoolgirls Banned From Lessons by Headmaster for Being "Too Blonde"](#) A headteacher has come under fire from parents and pupils after banning two 16-year-olds from school for being "too blonde". Raegan Booth, 16, and Aby Western, 15, say they were threatened with expulsion by David Alexander unless they dyed their hair brown. The girls claim they are being forced to adhere to the strict dress code of Rednock School in Dursley, Gloucestershire, in order to sit GCSE exams. But Raegan remains adamant that her hair is a natural shade of blonde. She said: The school rules clearly state that there are to be no unnatural hair colours on students. Unnatural hair colours are blue, purple, green and bright red. Blonde is considered a natural hair colour and there are many different shades. The head claims that he must follow the rules. To me this suggests that certain students are being made to look a way which is against their will. I believe this is wrong and no amount of hair dye affects a persons ability in school. The teenager, who is refusing to dye her hair a darker shade, added: As

we are in the middle of our GCSE year, we should not be excluded over something so petty. This is a crucial time for us and we should be focusing solely on our grades as opposed to our level of appearance. Martin Booth, Raegans father said: "Raegan is a model pupil and is working very hard towards her exams." She is always well turned out, her hair looks a very natural blonde. This is their final year, they are under enough pressure with GCSEs, they do not need to be worrying about their hair. Mr Alexander, who is due to meet with Raegan, denies the claims.

" Hat tip: Fjordman

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[UK: The LSE Caves in to Terror](#) First the Netherlands prosecutes Geert Wilders for speaking against Islamic terror; now the London School of Economics has caved in to the threat of Islamist violence. Douglas Murray, the director of the Centre for Social Cohesion, has been banned from chairing a debate on Islam at the London School of Economics today between Dr Alan Sked, a senior lecturer in international history, and Hamza Andreas Tzortzis, a Muslim writer and lecturer, because the LSE fears his views will provoke violence. Those views are outspoken opposition to the Islamisation of the west and staunch support for Israel. The LSE, where some Jewish students report a poisonous and frightening atmosphere at present, has just seen a week-long anti-Israel protest over Gaza. The Evening Standard reports: The LSE asked Mr Murray not to attend in the interest of public safety as his presence could provoke further unrest. A spokesman added: "He has spoken at LSE in the past and will be welcome to do so again in the future. Another victory for the forces of darkness, thanks to the pusillanimity of the LSE which, finding itself on the battlefield of the war to defend civilisation, has run up the white flag.

" Hat tip: Gaia

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[Wilders, Freedom of Speech or Discrimination?](#) [Comment from Tuan Jim: page has image of motoon with turban bomb] Geert Wilders, the controversial Dutch politician who has been very vocal in expressing his negative opinions about Islam, is to be prosecuted for alleged hate speech and discrimination, the appeals court in Amsterdam decided on Wednesday. Calls to try Wilders for his statements that violence is inextricably linked to Islam and that the Quran and Hiltlers Mein Kampf are similarly fascists books, had previously fallen on deaf ears. But the courts ruling reverses a decision made last year by the public prosecutors office, which said Wilders comments had been made as a contribution to the debate on Islam in Dutch society. His remarks may have been painful for Muslims, but they could not be deemed criminal, the prosecutor decided in response to dozens of cases filed against Wilders after he launched his anti-Islam film Fitna. The judges, however, said they had weighed Wilders anti-Islam rhetoric against his right to free speech, and ruled he had gone beyond the normal leeway granted to politicians. Prosecution of Wilders is in the public interest, the court decided, because in a democratic legal system a clear line about hate speech in the realm of public debate needs to be drawn. The Netherlands long had a reputation for tolerance towards its " largely Moroccan and Turkish " immigrant population, but the tone of the debate has changed radically in the past decade. After right-wing populist politician Pim Fortuyn, filmmaker Theo van Gogh and Somali refugee and former member of parliament Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Geert Wilders is the strongest voice against what he calls, æthe islamisation of the Netherlands. What do you think: should Wilders be prosecuted for discrimination and hate speech, or does he have every democratic right to voice his opinion " even if that opinion is offensive to some people?; 16 comments currently follow " interesting reading.

" Hat tip: Tuan Jim

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[Bereaved Families Split on Terrorist Release](#) Many Israelis who have lost loved ones to terrorism have spoken out recently on the possibility of a mass terrorist release in exchange for the return of kidnapped IDF soldier Gilad Shalit. While some have publicly said they would let their loved ones killers go free in exchange for Shalit, others have taken a strong stance against terrorist release. Earlier this week Yael Zeevi, whose husband Rehavam (Gandhi) Zeevi was assassinated by terrorists in 2001, announced that she would be willing to see her husbands killers go free if it meant Shalits safe return. She was joined by 100 other bereaved families, who signed a letter to Acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert in which they expressed willingness to see their own family members murderers go free for Shalit. Another widow who spoke out in favor of prisoner release was Rachel Koren, whose husband and two teenage sons were murdered in the bombing of the Matza restaurant in Haifa. æI cant live with the knowledge that theres a boy rotting in prison on my conscience, she explained. æThey should release whoever they have to release in order to bring him back home. Other families, and representatives of terrorist victims, have taken a strong stance against terrorist release. æI'm in touch with many families, and this support [for terrorist release] is likely to

provoke rebellion, warned Zeev Rap, whose 15-year-old daughter Helena was stabbed to death by a terrorist in 1992. "Whoever supports this process doesn't understand the suffering they're causing us," he added. "If they release my daughter's murderer, they'll destroy my family and the families of others," Rap continued. He threatened to take the law into his own hands in such a case, saying, "I'll murder him before he leaves our borders, at the border fence. I'll die with the Philistines." Efraim Kastiel made a simple plea against release, saying, "My heart hurts for Gilad Shalit but I just can't handle it from a psychological standpoint. My heart won't allow it, I just can't. Kastiel's daughter Liat was one of two young women stabbed to death by terrorists in Wadi Kelt in 1997. Rachel Friedman lost her sister and niece, Lily and Tamara Shimashvili, in the 2001 bombing of the Sbarro restaurant in Jerusalem. "I think our army is strong enough to find a different way to release Gilad Shalit, and not by releasing murderers," she said. Stanley Boim's 17-year-old son David was murdered nine years ago in a terrorist shooting near the town of Beit El. Boim, who opposes terrorist release, explained that he was not motivated by a desire for revenge, but rather by a desire to protect others. "The release of killers means the murder of more Jews in the Land of Israel," he said. One of David Boim's killers was not caught after the murder, and later carried out an attack in downtown Jerusalem in which several people were killed. Like Friedman, Boim believes Israel can free Shalit without releasing terrorists. "We need to do everything possible to free Shalit, but via pressure on Hamas and not on our government," he stated. Protests for Shalit, Against Release As Olmert's term comes to an end, protests for Shalit's release have picked up steam. Demonstrations calling for Shalit's release have been held in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem this week, and Friends of Shalit began a steady presence outside the Prime Minister's Office in Jerusalem on Friday. Three bereaved fathers protested the protest, standing opposite a Shalit rally in Tel Aviv and rejecting calls to release terrorists. The fathers, Yossi Mendelovich, Dov Weinstein and Zion Swery, said they would gather more bereaved parents to join them in rallying opposite demonstrations in support of terrorist release.

" Hat tip: VH

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Conflict in Gaza Has Highlighted Divisions in Arab World The prime minister of Qatar speaks of reconciliation among Arab countries, but many observers are emphasizing how Hamas now finds itself at a crossroads: whether to return within the Arab "family," or continue being "a weapon in the hands of Tehran." Beirut (AsiaNews) "Reconciliation among Egypt, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Syria, on the aid to be given to the inhabitants of the Gaza Strip, hit by the Israeli attack. The news has been delivered personally by the prime minister of Qatar, Sheikh Hamad bin Jasssem Al-Thani, on Al-Jazeera, the television channel based in Doha. While the Israeli army continues its withdrawal from Gaza, and another night has gone by peacefully, if the minister of Qatar sees an overcoming of the divisions revealed in all their profundity precisely by events in Gaza, from various directions there is emphasis of the disagreements within the Arab world. And Hamas itself is being asked to learn its lesson and choose which path it will take, that of permanent conflict or that of the search for peace " meaning whether it will follow the direction pointed out by Iran, or by Egypt. The pan-Arab newspaper Asharq Al-Awsat, in an editorial by Abdul Rahman Al-Rashed, general manager of the satellite television station Al-Arabiya, affirms that the Arab front "seems even more divided than it was during the war in Lebanon in 2006, and the attack by Hezbollah against the Sunni population in Beirut in May of 2008. "The leaders of the Hamas movement- because there is not one single leader that can be addressed- have two choices with regards to their [foreign] relations that will decide the fate of the movement, especially as they are aware of their strengths and weaknesses in confronting Israel. "Hamas is facing a new history, and has been given another chance to review its position and chose between staying in Iran's camp, or returning to the Arab side. "Hamas must be aware that they were used by Iran to attack the Arabs in an unprecedented way that surpasses any previous antagonism. Iran has progressed as a result of this, and made advancements on the ground to an extremely dangerous point, which includes the attempt to create chaos in Arab countries opposed to it, and explicitly seeking to destroy Saudi Arabia, and incite the overthrow of the Egyptian regime. Such audacity serves only to unite Arab countries against Hamas. However it is also just and reasonable to say that the door is still open; it is up to the Hamas movement to choose between returning to the Arab family or remaining a weapon in the hands of Iran. "Hamas is in a good position, and must negotiate with itself with regards to its own relationship with the Arabs, who can only respect Hamas and ensure its political and material rights on Palestinian soil. Generally speaking, we know that Hamas is not a singular organization, despite the similarity of its language and political façade; there is Hamas the hostage to Damascus and Tehran and whose leaders live in hotels, and there is the Gazan Hamas who have paid a high price in order to fulfill the orders of their brothers in Damascus, the results of which were always disastrous. The Gazan Hamas must chose between Tehran or Cairo. On the divisions among Arabs, the Middle East Times notes in an editorial that if both the Israelis

and Hamas claim that they are victorious, œwho are the losers? The Arabs, of course. Why? The Arab world comes out of this war far more divided than it has been in decades. Egypt and Syria, the two powerhouses in the Middle East remain as far apart as they have ever been. œAnd one side has been working overtime trying to convince the rest of the Arab world that they should sever ties with the Jewish state (Syrias view), while Egypts approach to the conflict is to keep negotiations with Israel going.œThe Arab world continues to show its inability to present a unified front despite the rhetoric paid at the altar of Arab unity. They gather, they meet, they argue, and they issue communiqués, all without any real substance and come out in worse shape than they went in. Would the Arabs have learned from mistakes of the past? Hardly, as they keep committing them again and again and again. War has been tried for over 60 years and without great success. Maybe someone should, as John Lennon used to say, ~give peace a chance.

" Hat tip: C. Cantoni

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[Gaza: Livni, Israel Has the Right to Strike Tunnels Again](#)(ANSAmEd) " JERUSALEM, JANUARY 22 " Although it has withdrawn from the Gaza Strip, Israel is reserving the right to target underground tunnels connecting the Palestinian territory to Egypt and used by Hamas for smuggling arms into the Strip. The declaration has come this morning on military radio from Israels foreign minister, Tzipi Livni. œAs far as the tunnels are concerned, Ms Livni stated, œnothing will be as it was before. Things have to be clear: Israel reserves the right to act in a military way against the tunnels, full **stop**. If it is necessary to act, we shall; we shall exercise our legitimate right to self defence and we shall not entrust our fate neither to the Egyptians nor to the Europeans and neither to the Americans, the head of Israeli diplomacy stated. (ANSAmEd).

" Hat tip: Insubria

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[Hamas: Obama Doesnt Represent Change](#)In first remarks on Gaza, president calls for end to rockets, Israeli pull-outDAMASCUS, Syria " President Barack Obamas position toward the Palestinians does not represent change and will lead to the same mistakes as his predecessor, a Hamas spokesman said Thursday.The comments by Beirut-based Osama Hamdan follow Obamas first public comments on the Israeli-Palestinian crisis since his inauguration.Hamdan tells Al-Jazeera television he expects Obama to experience failure in the region over the next four years if he sticks with his current position.Obama said Thursday that Hamas must end rocket fire at Israel and Israel must œcomplete the withdrawal of its forces from Gaza. Although those steps were taken this week, low-level violence has marred the fragile cease-fire that ended Israels three week offensive in Gaza.

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[Hamas Hijacks Humanitarian Aid](#)Hamas is hijacking some of the 6,000 tons of international humanitarian aid that have entered Gaza this week for the poor, and instead is using the goods to fund its own support system, the Israeli government charged. Since the beginning of Operation Cast Lead over three weeks ago, Israel has supervised the delivery of nearly 50,000 tons into Gaza but has no supervision over the trucks after the food and medicines are transferred to Arab trucks at Gaza crossings.Armed terrorists have stolen several trucks at gunpoint, forcing one Jordanian company to suspend operations, charged the government agency that supervises coordination of the aid.Israel has warned the international community that reconstruction programs for Gaza must not pass through Hamas hands in order to prevent giving the terrorist organization legitimacy and the opportunity to use aid for its own purposes.Reports of Hamas confiscating aid, using it for its members and selling the rest of it on the black market surfaced nearly two weeks ago, after Israel decided halt fire for three hours a day to allow trucks to enter Gaza.United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) spokesman Chris Gunness said that the U.N. agency is investigating the reports that the hijacked Jordanian trucks were destined for UNRWA. œWe are not aware of any aid being diverted, he stated but added that officials still are investigating the reports of hijacking.Gunness added that between a third and a half of the humanitarian aid is for UNRWA. Egypt and the private sector operate most of the other trucks, and a small amount goes to various other U.N. agencies. The UNRWA aid is shipped from the port in Ashdod via Israeli trucks to the Kerem Shalom crossing, where agency officials deliver the trucks to UNRWA warehouses.Hamas and its rival Fatah faction have accused each other of stealing the aid, with Hamas charging that Fatah is diverting aid to Arabs in Judea and Samaria.

" Hat tip: VH

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[Israel: Huge Natural Gas Find Off Israel Coast](#)Official hails ~historic moment that could change nationNEW YORK " A huge deep-water natural gas find off the coast of Israel promises to be a boon to the Jewish

states economy as well as a stimulus to other developers searching for offshore oil and natural gas in the Mediterranean. Noble Energy, a New York Stock Exchange-listed company, has discovered an estimated more than 3 trillion cubic feet of natural gas in three high-quality reservoirs drilled in the companys Tamar No. 1 well in the Mediterranean Sea, about 56 miles off the Israeli northern port of Haifa. Noble Energy drilled the Tamar No. 1 well to a depth of about three miles, beneath 5,500 feet of water. The find is significant for those who believe the Bible indicates Israel is sitting on a massive oil reserve that would reshape the geopolitical structure of the Middle East.

" Hat tip: JD

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[Israel Readies for Fight Against War Crime Charges](#) Prime Minister Ehud Olmert has put the justice minister in charge of defending Israel against charges of war crimes during its 22-day Gaza assault, a government source said Friday. Daniel Friedman will lead an inter-ministerial team to coordinate a legal defence for civilians and the military, the source said. And Defence Minister Ehud Barak was also due to ask the government to approve on Sunday a bill offering moral and legal backing to army officers and soldiers following Operation Cast Lead, his ministry said. "The Israeli government bore responsibility for sending the Israel Defence Forces (army) commanders and soldiers to protect its citizens and therefore it is obliged to offer full backing to prevent any harm they might be exposed to in view of their involvement, the statement said. Israels military censor has already banned the publication of the identity of the unit leaders who fought against Hamas Islamists in the Gaza Strip for fear they might face war crimes charges. On Tuesday, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon demanded that those responsible for bombing UN buildings in the Palestinian territory should be made accountable and accused Israel of using excessive force. Amnesty International said it was undeniable that Israel had used white phosphorus in crowded civilian areas, contrary to international law, charging that this amounted to a war crime.

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[Norway: Undiplomatic Embassy E-Mail](#) Norway has contacted Israeli authorities after an administrative secretary at the Norwegian Embassy in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, sent an e-mail which compared the Israeli military operations in Gaza to Holocaust. The Norwegian Department of Foreign Affairs (UD) says this is far from Norways official view, and is sure Israel is aware of this fact. The e-mail contained pictures showing Nazi atrocities paralleled with Israeli military actions in Gaza. UD-spokesman Haakon Svane says to Aftenposten that the Department has made it explicitly clear that the content of the e-mail in no way represents Norways view. - We disassociate ourselves from the type of comparisons made in the e-mail, Svane says. Svane says Norway has not received any reaction from Israeli authorities after the Jerusalem Post reported the content of the e-mail. He does not want to comment on what consequences the e-mail will have for the embassy secretary, saying this is an internal personnel matter.

" Hat tip: Tuan Jim

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[Report: Hamas Lied About Gaza Casualties](#) (IsraelNN.com) Italian journalist Lorenzo Cremonesi, who works with the Corriere della serra newspaper, reported Thursday that Hamas had vastly overstated the number of civilian deaths in Gaza. While Hamas claims that 1,330 residents of Gaza were killed in the operation and approximately 5,000 wounded, the real number of casualties was far lower, Cremonesi says. Cremonesis report was based on his own findings after touring hospitals in Gaza and talking to families of those killed or wounded. "It is sufficient to visit several [Gaza] hospitals to understand that the numbers dont add up, he explained. Cremonesi estimated that between 500 to 600 people were killed in the fighting. Most were young men between the ages of 17 and 23 who were members of Hamas, he said. Many hospitals had several empty beds, he reported. Hamas has stated that Gaza hospitals are filled to capacity due to the large number of victims, with many of the wounded being turned away due to the shortage of doctors and supplies. The Italian report also confirmed Israeli allegations that Hamas had used civilians as human shields and used ambulances and United Nations buildings in the fighting. Those who tried to drive the terrorists away in order to protect their families were beaten!

" Hat tip: CB

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[UNRWA Schools in Gaza Infiltrated by Palestinian Terrorists " Jonathan D. Halevi](#) Recent years have seen the gradual takeover of UNRWA educational and welfare institutions in Gaza by Palestinian terrorist organizations, led by Hamas. Just six months after Hamas general election victory, it won a clear victory in the UNRWA workers committee elections held on 14 June 2006. Suhil el-Hindi, head of the teachers sector at UNRWA schools, operates

openly as Hamas representative. He controls the curriculum in UNRWA schools, the employment of teachers in those schools, and the summer camps. Hamas Interior Minister Said Sayyam, responsible for Hamas terror operations, who was targeted in the recent Gaza war, was a teacher at UNRWA schools for 23 years. Following the Hamas takeover of Gaza in June 2007, parents of students in UNRWA schools wrote to the head of UNRWA charging that scores of teachers at the schools belonged to the Al-Aqsa Brigades, the military wing of Hamas, and requested an urgent investigation. In another example, Awad el-Kik, the principal of an UNRWA school in Rafiah, was also head of weapons and rocket manufacturing for Islamic Jihad in Gaza until he was targeted on 30 April 2008. It seems very likely that contributions by Western nations to UNRWA pay the salaries of Hamas and Islamic Jihad terrorists who are educating the next generation of Palestinians in jihad against Israel and all non-Muslims. Western nations should demand that terror group activists be removed from UN institutions as a condition of continued funding. Lt. Col. (res.) Jonathan Dahoah-Halevi is a senior researcher at the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs and co-founder of the Orient Research Group Ltd.

" Hat tip: VH

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[Banks: Turkish Bankers Star Shines in the Gulf Region](#)(ANSAméd) " ANKARA, JANUARY 20 " Demand for top Turkish bankers have been increasing in Dubai. Currently there are nearly 100 Turkish bankers, mostly working at top-level executive positions and that is simply because of their expertise in crisis management, as Hurriyet daily reported. As the impact of the global economic crisis continues to spread around the world, Dubai has become a very popular destination for many bankers. And Dubai's financial establishments seem to be leaning toward hiring Turkish bankers, due to their experience on how to survive in an environment of crisis. "Turkish bankers are hired for key executive jobs. Currently there are five Turkish bankers working for National Bank of Abu Dhabi and they are in charge of departments such as treasury and asset management, where the decisions on how to manage money in the midst of crisis are made. Gıyas Gökent, the bank's chief economist said. "We receive hundreds of CVs everyday. This place is now among the world's top financial centers. It opened a new employment door for the western world, Gökent said adding that "now many bankers from Europe and the United States show great interest in job opportunities in Dubai. "Turkish bankers are already well known in the international market for their capabilities. Adding the crisis experience on top of that, there is no wonder they are the few selected ones for executive level jobs, Gökent declared. Many Turkish bankers have top-level jobs all around the world. For example, Tevfik Akdag is the director of investment banking at National Bank of Abu Dhabi, while Hulusi Horozoglu is the group leader of the Citi Islamic Investment Bank and Alper Yuksel was hired by Barclays Bank to serve as the bank's deputy director general last year. (ANSAméd).

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[Freed by the U.S., Saudi Becomes a Qaeda Chief](#)BEIRUT, Lebanon " The emergence of a former Guantánamo Bay detainee as the deputy leader of Al Qaeda's Yemeni branch has underscored the potential complications in carrying out the executive order President Obama signed Thursday that the detention center be shut down within a year. The militant, Said Ali al-Shihri, is suspected of involvement in a deadly bombing of the United States Embassy in Yemen's capital, Sana, in September. He was released to Saudi Arabia in 2007 and passed through a Saudi rehabilitation program for former jihadists before resurfacing with Al Qaeda in Yemen. His status was announced in an Internet statement by the militant group and was confirmed by an American counterterrorism official. "They're one and the same guy, said the official, who insisted on anonymity because he was discussing an intelligence analysis. "He returned to Saudi Arabia in 2007, but his movements to Yemen remain unclear. The development came as Republican legislators criticized the plan to close the Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, detention camp in the absence of any measures for dealing with current detainees. But it also helps explain why the new administration wants to move cautiously, taking time to work out a plan to cope with the complications. Almost half the camps' remaining detainees are Yemenis, and efforts to repatriate them depend in part on the creation of a Yemeni rehabilitation program " partly financed by the United States " similar to the Saudi one. Saudi Arabia has claimed that no graduate of its program has returned to terrorism. "The lesson here is, whoever receives former Guantánamo detainees needs to keep a close eye on them, the American official said!

" Hat tip: LN

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[Iran: Mass Execution for Iran Murderers](#)Ten convicted murderers have been put to death in a single day in Iran, state media says. The men were hanged on Wednesday morning at a jail in the capital, Tehran, the Iran

newspaper reported. The BBC's correspondent in Iran says the authorities have taken to carrying out mass executions because they see it as an extra deterrent.

" Hat tip: JD

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[*Iraqi Bishops to Ask Pope for Mideast Synod*](#)(ANSAmEd) " VATICAN CITY, JANUARY 22 " Iraqi bishops will ask Pope Benedict XVI to create a Middle East synod in order to safeguard Catholics living in the region, they announced on Thursday. A delegation of Iraqi bishops in Rome for a two-day visit with the pontiff are set to make their request on Friday. If the pontiff agrees to the plan, the synod will be the first to encompass the entire Middle East region. æIt's time for the Holy See to consider a synod for the bishops living in Iraq, Syria, Jordan, Israel and the rest of the Middle East, as has been done for South America, said the Chaldean Archbishop of Kirkuk, Louis Sako. æOn our own we are not capable of organising ourselves, while a general synod would help all the bishops of the eastern churches to work together with the Holy See, he added. Bishops in the Middle East æcould help to define the (Catholic Church's) relationship with Islam and work to reduce the number of Christians leaving Iraq to seek refuge in neighbouring countries, Sako said. æOur Muslim brothers are ready to accept pluralism and dialogue: the Christians are a small community in Iraq but we have a role in society and, with a synod, could prepare for the future. Sako said very few expatriate Christians were returning to Iraq, and those that had done so came from Syria and Jordan where æthey were living in misery. If the Church fails to take a strong position, æChristians will continue to leave the Middle East, he stressed. In January the Vatican news agency Fides said in its annual report that Iraqi Christians are still being forced to flee the country because of religious persecution and a spate of killings in Mosul which prompted Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki to send extra police to the city. Before the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 there were some 800,000 Christians living in the country, but around 250,000 are estimated to have since fled the country. The Chaldean Catholic Archbishop of Mosul, Paulos Faraj Rahho, was kidnapped and killed in February. Photo: Louis Sako.

" Hat tip: Insubria

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[*Lebanon: Photos Nasrallah With Madonna and Saints, Polemic*](#)(ANSAmEd) " BEIRUT, JANUARY 22 " The black turban of the Shiite leader of the Lebanese Hezbollah movement alongside an image of the Virgin Mary and the most important Lebanese Christian saints: this is what can be seen on certain photos in rosary beads and bracelets, as published a few days ago on the internet. According to the Beirut news site, NowLebanon, besides the images of the trinkets bearing Hassan Nasrallah's profile alongside that of the Madonna and in San Sharbil, a video was also recently published on the internet showing a choir of young people praise the Shiite movement under the roof of a Christian church in Beirut, perhaps San Giuseppe, which is on the edge of the southern part of the city, and is a traditional Hezbollah stronghold. æWe are not responsible for the photos, nor for the production or design of the bracelets and rosaries, Hussein Rahhal said, a spokesperson for the Shiite movement, as quoted by NowLebanon. æThe Lebanese constitution decrees the freedom of religious expression and perhaps there are many Christians who consider Nasrallah to be a saint, Rahhal added. The An-Nahar newspaper in Beirut had reported the story in previous days, affirming that the bracelets and rosaries were made in the Shiite suburbs of the city. Many Lebanese Christian authorities have themselves denounced the circulation of these objects as æan insult to Christian saints. (ANSAmEd).

" Hat tip: Insubria

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[*Political Islam Splits Doha Forum, From Sat. on BBC World*](#)(ANSAmEd) " ROME, JANUARY 23 " Does political Islam really constitute a threat to the West? This subject split the participants at the latest round of the Doha Debates, a forum of open debate to be broadcast tomorrow and the day after on BBC World News. The Doha debates are held in Qatar, on a monthly basis, in front of an audience of around 350 people. They are promoted by the private Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development, and is presented by former BBC correspondent, Tim Sebastian. In the debate held on January 19, which is to be screened seven times on the British channel, the motion proposed for discussion is æThis **assembly** believes that political Islam constitutes a threat to the West: a motion which was not, in the end, passed, although getting 49 pct of votes cast. Among the speakers in favour " reports a note issued by Coreis, whose deputy president, Yayha Pallavicini, was one of the speakers " was Maajid Nawaz, former head of the British branch of the Islamist movement, Hizb ut-Tahir, which has been banned in some countries. Nawaz, says the Coreis note, turned away from his extremist ideas after four years spent in prison in Egypt, stating that he was opposed to those who ægo into politics with the single purpose of using

the Holy Scripture to lend credence to their political programmes. In this regard he cited Hamas as a classic example of this trend, pointing out how just before Israels military operation into Gaza, it had passed a penal code which included both whipping and mutilation as punishments. It isnt that moderates or extremists dont exist, but that the ideology of a politicised Islam has generated jihadism. Also in favour of the motion was Pallavicini, who said that œexploiting Islam for brain-washing and misleading people constitutes not just a threat to the West but also to the East, the international community and to all people of faith. Against the motion, on the other hand, spoke Shadi Hamid, senior member of Stanford University (USA), saying that some of the worlds extremist groups have given up violence and are engaged in the democratic process. Challenged by Tim Sebastian, Hamid said he did not believe that either Hamas or Hezbollah were threats to the West. Neither of these two movements being in fact representative of Islam hard-liners in general nor were they capable of defeating Israel. At the centre of the debate were also Irans ~nuclear ambitions and the controversial nature of the relationship between religion and politics in Islam. (ANSAmEd).

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[Turkey: Ancient Monastery Threatened](#)**Muslims legal action against 1,600-year-old structure called ~malicious.**ISTANBUL, January 22 (Compass Direct News) " Syriac Christians in southeastern Turkey say a land dispute over the historic Mor Gabriel Monastery is part of a larger system of discrimination against the religious minority in this overwhelmingly Islamic country.Muslim residents of southeastern Turkey dispute the boundary lines of an ancient Christian monastery dating to the fourth century as being unnecessarily large for the needs of a religious community. Islamic village leaders from Yayvantepe, Eglence and Candarli are attempting to confiscate one-third of the monasterys property, claiming it was wrongfully appropriated and that they need it for their livestock.Area Muslims also say the land in question is forest and thereby registered as land belonging to the State Treasury.œOur land is being occupied by the monastery, said Ismail Erlal, village leader of Yayvantepe, according to Cihan News Agency. œWe make use of the forest there and pasture our animals; we wont give up our rights.Among the most contentious issues are the monastery walls built around its perimeter, rebuilt 15 years ago. Village leaders complain in a lawsuit to obtain the land that the monastery has gone beyond its rightful bounds. In August the land survey office of Midyat said it had determined that 270 hectares of the monasterys 760 hectares were government property, including land inside and outside the monasterys walls.

" Hat tip: JD

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[Vatican: Iraqi Bishops Launch Appeal to Pope to Stop Christians Fleeing](#)Vatican City, 22 Jan. (AKI) " A delegation of Chaldean bishops launched an appeal to Pope Benedict XVI on Thursday to call for a general synod or church council to create a strategy to prevent Christians from leaving the region.œThe Holy See should think of a general synod for the Middle East for these Christians as these already take place in Asia, Africa and Latin America, said the Chaldean archbishop of the Iraqi city of Kirkuk Luis Sako.Sako said the church should deal with this problem rapidly before all Christians leave the region.It is urgent œthat the church takes a clear position in regards to the problems, (of the Christian community in the Middle East) otherwise Christians will leave this land, said Sako.Sako also stressed that all œEastern churches work together with the Vatican to look at issues such as interfaith dialogue with Islam and the role of Christians in politics among others.œWe need the closeness of the church. We have the feeling of being isolated and forgotten, he said.Sako also said the church should make its presence felt in the area, something that Muslims also benefit from.œThere is an absence of the church in the area. We need to remember that the church is not only prayer and liturgy.œEven our Muslim brothers expect something from us, and we are there to help them understand pluralism, he said.On behalf of the rest of the delegation, Sako said the problems of the Christians are the same in Lebanon and Palestine. For this reason, all bishops from the region " with the help of the Vatican " must tackle a series of issues together, he argued.Sako concluded by saying that in the last few years, there has been more than 500 Iraqi Christian ~martyrs who have been killed.The delegation was composed of the deputy Chaldean bishop of Baghdad, Shlemon Warduni, and two Syriac-Catholic Iraqi bishops, Georges Casmoussa and Matti Matoka.The Chaldean Catholic Church is one of the oldest Christian churches in the world, but hundreds of thousands of Christians have been forced to flee Iraq to escape the violence and the economic crisis caused by the war.

" Hat tip: C. Cantoni

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[Lessons From the Russian Gas Dispute](#) Russia and Ukraine have found a compromise to their gas dispute, but the long-term effects of the three-week deep freeze are still unknown. The acrimonious three-week natural gas dispute between Russia and Ukraine, which left millions of customers in Central and Eastern Europe freezing without gas for heating, is now finally over. Under a face-saving compromise finally hammered out on Jan. 20, Russias Gazprom has achieved its central objective of making Ukraine pay market prices for its gas, which will be linked to the European average. But to sweeten the pill, Ukraine has notched a 20 percent discount during 2009. Other terms of the deal include a one-year freeze on transit fees charged by Ukraine and the elimination of RosUkrEnergo, a controversial trading outfit that has acted as intermediary in the Russia-Ukraine gas trade. Both parties are attempting to frame the outcome as a victory and are already disagreeing over the implications for gas prices. Ukrainian Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko has said the rate per 1,000 cubic meters will average \$228 for the full year " well below the \$280 predicted by Gazprom (though higher than the \$179.50 that Ukraine paid last year). With both sides already disagreeing about the deals economic implications, the possibility of future disputes arising between the two countries certainly cannot be discounted. "The big question mark is what happens if Ukraine again runs into arrears, notes Chris Weafer, chief strategist at Russias Uralsib Bank. In any case, the long-term impact of the dispute will go far beyond the immediate implications for energy relations between Russia and Ukraine. Despite similarities with the previous bust-up in 2006, Western energy experts emphasize the latest dispute has been far more serious, with lasting implications for the European energy market. "This has been the most serious security event in relation to gas that has ever happened in Europe, says Jonathan Stern, director of gas research at the Oxford Institute for Energy Studies. "It cannot be allowed to happen again. Exactly what the long-term implications will be are still rather hard to fathom. It doesnt help that many fundamental facts about the dispute remain clouded in controversy " including the key question of who was ultimately responsible for cutting off Europes gas. While Russia accuses Ukraine of blocking Russian gas supplies to Europe during the dispute, the Ukrainians say that it was actually the Russians who turned off the taps. Ukraine Shares the Blame Getting to the bottom of such matters has more than purely academic significance. For one thing, the threat of legal action by Gazproms European customers remains real " potentially exposing the company to huge claims for damages. The debate about responsibility will also rumble on because it matters for the future of European energy policy. "If its a Ukraine problem, then pipelines bypassing Ukraine are one answer to it. If, however, its a Russia problem, it doesnt matter where the pipelines (from Russia) go, says Oxfords Stern. Whats already clear is that, in notable contrast to the 2006 spat that was widely blamed on Russia, this time Western observers have also pointed fingers at Ukraine. "This time round, its clear that Ukrainian politicians have a lot to answer for, says Kash Burkett, energy and utilities analyst at Datamonitor in London. The crisis coincides with intense political turmoil inside Ukraine, including open conflict between President Viktor Yushchenko and Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, which has seriously complicated negotiations with Russia. The problems in Ukraine mean the dispute is likely to add impetus to energy projects that bypass the country. In particular, Russia backs the Nord Stream pipeline under the Baltic, a project 51 percent-owned by Gazprom, in partnership with Germanys BASF and E.ON and Dutch energy firm Gasunie. Yet despite this positive news for Russias pet project, many Western experts predict that ultimately Russia and Gazprom will turn out to be the biggest losers. **They are mystified why, in response to Ukraines alleged pilfering of Russias gas, Gazprom apparently responded by cutting off all gas supplies through Ukraine to Europe. "Thats the big question, says Pierre Noël, an energy policy expert at Cambridge University.. "Large importers of Russian gas in Western and Eastern Europe have been really scared by what has happened. There will be lasting damage to Gazproms reputation. He predicts that European governments will now discourage major importers from increasing their exposure to Russian gas. "**

" Hat tip: Tuan Jim

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[Russia: Journalists From Novaya Gazeta Are "Assassination Targets](#) Journalists on Russias leading investigative newspaper are being made targets for assassination in a bid to force its closure, one of its owners said yesterday. Alexander Lebedev said that at least three reporters on Novaya Gazeta, the opposition paper that also employed Anna Politkovskaya, had been assigned bodyguards because of fears for their lives. He had asked the Federal Security Service (FSB), the successor to the KGB, to allow staff to carry guns after accusing the Russian state of failing to protect them. Mr Lebedev, the new owner of the Evening Standard, was speaking out after the lawyer Stanislav Markelov was assassinated on a street in central Moscow. Anastasia Baburova, a young Novaya Gazeta journalist, was also shot dead in the attack in broad daylight on Monday. Mr Markelov had provided legal advice to journalists working on investigations at Novaya Gazeta for eight years. He was killed by a lone gunman

shortly after holding a press conference to denounce the early release of a former Russian army colonel jailed for the murder of a Chechen woman. Investigators have suggested that Mr Markelov was killed in relation to this case, which was first investigated by Ms Politkovskaya. Her assassination on Vladimir Putins birthday in October 2006 sparked worldwide outrage. But Mr Lebedev said that the lawyers murder was tied to his work for Novaya Gazeta and that Ms Baburova, 25, may also have been murdered for her reporting on neo-Nazi groups in Russia. She was the third reporter on the paper to be killed or to die in mysterious circumstances since 2003. "We have no doubts at the newspaper that this is connected to his work at the paper," Mr Lebedev said. "Some of our journalists have been under protection for quite a long time now. He disclosed that staff had been working on investigation that was so sensitive that editors had not yet published it out of concern for the reporters safety. "The editors feel personal responsibility for people dying and are saying that perhaps we just have to close it. I understand their position, I too feel a responsibility personally that people are dying. Mr Lebedev told The Times later that he did not believe the paper was the target of an organised conspiracy, but that an atmosphere of lawlessness in Moscow allowed people to kill with impunity. "It could be anybody from Chechen clans who are shooting each other in broad daylight to Nazi supporters who are reacting to these killings with joy on websites. It could be anyone as long as its so easy and they can get away with it," he said. Mr Lebedev said that the Kremlin "didn't give a damn and had not even offered its condolences. He added: "I can write that they have stolen hundreds of billions in the last three or four years but so what? They can sit there for another 20 years, with no parties, no elections, no proper media or judicial system and what are we going to do about it? Dmitri Muratov, Novaya Gazetas editor, said that the paper had started to publish articles without reporters names or with pseudonyms because of the threats they faced. Yulia Latynina, one of the papers columnists and an outspoken critic of Mr Putin, described the mood at the paper by recalling an official notice she had read about a corpse. It said that the deceased was a Russian citizen with "no other external damage on the body. "That sums it up. We are citizens of Russia and it is quite dangerous now to be a citizen of Russia," she said. The reporters continued their investigations because "somebody has to do it," she said, adding: "Somebody has to call a spade a spade and it will be much more dangerous to live in Russia without doing this.

" Hat tip: Tuan Jim

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[Ex Jihadi Gunned Down for Not Hiking Up His Trouser Above His Ankles](#) Scuffle over dress code **Mingora [Swat District, North-West Frontier Province, Pakistan]: Militants gunned down Amjad Islam, teacher of a private school who himself waged a Jihad against the Soviet forces in Afghanistan, for not hiking up his shalwar (trouser) above his ankles.** However, the issue did not end here but the militants went to the slain teachers house and gunned down his father, Ghani Akbar, a lawyer by profession. The militants later hung Amjads body from a pole in the Matta College Square. Locals said that the militants on Thursday morning asked the teacher of the Hira School at the College Square to hitch up his shalwar above his ankles. However, Amjad told them he was a former Mujahid himself and knew everything about Islam but nobody could be forced to pull up shalwar above the ankles. Continuing arguments, the teacher said that he had also saw the Taliban rule in Afghanistan who did not force into doing so, then how could they do? The arguments angered the militants and a scuffle took place. Amjad, who had a pistol, fired at the militants, killing Khalid on the spot and wounding two others. The schoolteacher was trying to flee but the militants fired at him and attacked him with daggers. He was killed on the spot. His body was hung from a pole and warned the locals not to touch his body till Friday morning. After killing the teacher, the militants scurried towards his house and dragged out his father, Sahibzada Ghani, and sprayed him with bullets. Locals said that Ghani was a religious and humble person and was respected in the area. The body of the schoolteacher, however, was taken to his house after the intervention of a local Jirga.

" Hat tip: VH

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[Finland: Sufficient Deterrence?](#) The lunar landscape shakes. Red streaks of light plunge toward targets over half a kilometre away. The armoured units in Vekaranjärvi are conducting exercises at the Pahkajärvi shooting range, which is known for its apocalyptically wide-open spaces. They are equipped with some of the most modern equipment that the Finnish Army has: Swedish CV 9030 assault tanks, which operate well in the dark, and in the fog and rain. The Defence Forces are pleased to show off Vekaranjärvi, and no wonder. The garrison of 3,000 soldiers is the biggest in Finland and it has the most modern equipment. However, this is not the entire story about the state of the Finnish Army. As the terrain vibrates in Pahkajärvi, national defence is a hot topic in Helsinki. Finnish foreign policy leaders are currently pushing through a new security and defence policy report, which should

come before Parliament in February. The drafting of the secretive report is taking longer than expected. The main reason for this is that after a long period of stability, Finland's security environment has changed. But how? And what would be the appropriate reaction to the changes? These are the difficult questions of the report, which has been under preparation since the summer of 2007. Some advance information has come out about the report. Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen (Centre) has said that there will be no NATO surprises. Applying for membership is being kept as a possibility, and option, which at least the present government will not invoke. Of the parties, only the National Coalition Party is openly supporting membership in the alliance. The generals have let it be understood that maintaining a credible defence requires more money. Adding confusion to the preparations of the report has been the war in Georgia, which took place in August. It showed that Russia is ready to use its military power in the territory of a neighbouring country. Georgia sparked debate on the state of regional defence in Finland. Although Finland is not a member of any military alliance, experts insist that Finland's capacity to defend itself is better than ever. "Our credibility has improved with respect to others," says Major Jyrki Raitasalo, who is researching Finnish Defence at the Department of Strategy of the National Defence University. The biggest factor in this is that Finland's neighbours have less capacity, in relative terms, than they did before. Russia remains a great power, and is developing its armed forces. Nevertheless, its military capacity is but a shadow of the power of the Soviet Union. The strength of the Russian Army in areas near Finland is a tenth of what it was. Sweden has cut back on its land forces, and is focussing on crisis management. The money is going to Afghanistan. Finland has also cut back on the wartime strength of its armed forces, but not as much as the others. This country still relies on conscription, which is getting to be exceptional in Europe. A reservist army of 350,000 is one of the biggest in Europe. However, the Defence Forces face considerable challenges in the next decade. The price of military hardware has doubled in seven years. If the aim is to keep the forces well equipped, it is necessary either to increase spending, or to cut back further on the Defence Forces. Or then to look for help elsewhere! But how long can Finland afford an independent defence? How big, and how developed an armed forces will Finland be able to equip in the future. Warfare is always a balancing act between numbers and technology. With modern weapons it is possible to replace a large field army, but not endlessly. In 1997, when the wartime readiness of the Defence Forces was 540,000. Finland now has just 350,000 reservists, and Chief of Defence Juhani Kaskeala has said that in the future, Finland would have to get by with 250,000, and even that might be a bit too high. Lieutenant General Matti Ahola (ret.), the former Chief of Staff at the Ministry of Defence, feels that ten years from now, no country in Europe will be able to maintain a credible defence on its own. "The options are either NATO or the EU. However, the EU has not yet developed into a defence alliance. So actually, it is NATO that is left. In a poll conducted in 2007 nearly half of all military officers in Finland said they were in favour of joining NATO. Only a fifth of the population at large supports NATO membership. However, the officers point out that even as a member of NATO, Finland would have to take care of its defence primarily by itself. Meanwhile, Finland would have to be ready to participate in NATO operations in Afghanistan, for instance, or help a member state that has been attacked. In the worst case, Finland could end up being a party to a conflict between NATO and Russia. Finland has already decided to take part in the NATO Response Force, and in EU battle groups, even though most of the population oppose joining an alliance because they do not want Finns to die in foreign conflicts. International crisis management improves the battle-readiness of Finnish forces. But if there is to be full-fledged participation in the operations, they will require some input. That effort would undermine Finnish regional defence. Jyrki Raitasalo says that cooperation in crisis management is partly about identity building for Finland. The country wants to be a part of the West, and to share responsibility. Russia, on the other hand, has questions about the enthusiasm that the West has for crisis management forces. "In the view of the Russians, the Western countries are voluntarily marginalising their their armed forces. They feel that Finland still has a capacity for traditional warfare. "The nation fights, but for how long? How long could Finland hold out against forces of the Leningrad Military District, for instance?" "For months. The relative strength is no problem. With high technology it is possible to fight against an overwhelming enemy," says Matti Ahola. "But if the war lasts more than three months, supremacy in war materiel will decide. Finland would run out of munitions. More missiles would be needed already in a few weeks. In the last war, they were manufactured at home, but now they need to be bought from abroad, and if there is a crisis in the world, the arms trade becomes more complex. In an extended war a great power will be able to move reinforcements to the conflict areas. In addition, Finland is rather defenceless, if someone decides to fire ballistic missiles at us. Such missiles often contain nuclear warheads. In the view of researcher Pekka Visuri (Colonel, ret.) The idea of a nuclear attack against Finland is preposterous, and there is no point to try to set up defences against it. "If we were alone in a conflict with a great power, it would be a disaster. On the other hand, in an extensive international crisis, in which the great powers were pitted against

each other, the Finnish Defence Forces are set up to prevent an attack. Politics would seem to be the best defence after all; to act in such a way that nobody feels that there is a threat against them from Finnish territory. Nobody seems to anticipate any answers to big questions, at least from any new reports. There is no intention to join NATO, but on the other hand, it is difficult to imagine that significant amounts of money would be spent on defence. Finland is looking to see in what direction the EU and NATO are developing, and what Russia is doing. Maybe everything will turn out all right.

" Hat tip: Tuan Jim

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[India: "Partial War Looming Between China, India?"](#) **Military suggests border dispute is "threat to Beijing"** A border dispute could become the spark that launches China and India into a military conflict, with Chinese strategists resurrecting the concept of a "partial war" to recover what they call "Southern Tibet," the region India calls "Arunachal Pradesh," according to a report from Joseph Farah's G2 Bulletin. The area in northeast India has a 650-mile unfenced border with China, which lays claim to the region and refers to it as Southern Tibet. Some of the threats are emanating from Chinese publications that reflect the opinion of the Chinese leadership without making official comments.

" Hat tip: JD

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[India: Kingdom of the Forgotten](#) **Christians face forced ejection from refugee camps, death** NEW YORK CITY (Assist News Service) " The headlines blare genocide, persistent and systematically planned. The government stands on the sidelines, watching the unfolding horror while doing little to nothing. More than 70,000 are forced into horrific refugee camps and then ejected from them with no place to go. Returning home for this particular people may mean instant death or living the rest of their lives in constant fear and vigilance with the threat of forced religious conversion hanging over their heads. Questions abound: Where is this happening? How long has this been going on? Families turned out of refugee centers with nowhere to go? Why is the government wordlessly condoning the terror afflicting its own people? Why isn't this story in the mainstream media? Shouldn't the mention of genocide call for world wide media attention? The people featured in these articles are Christians from the state of Orissa in India. Christian news organizations, such as Voice of the Martyrs, Mission Network News, and Compass Direct have been following the events as far back as July 2007. The New York Times, on the other hand, had only two articles in September and October of 2008. The Los Angeles Times mentioned the violence in Orissa in one paragraph of an article about the Mumbai attacks on Thanksgiving. But VOM, MNN, and CD have 10 to over a dozen different articles each on the violence in Orissa. The blatant discrepancy in reporting raises questions beyond the news outlets coverage of religious violence. What does it mean to represent and report well when it comes to something as personal as religion? What other stories concerning the abuse and mistreatment of Christians around the world has the mainstream media neglected to report? Who are the Christians being attacked and abused around the world, and who is covering their stories?

" Hat tip: JD

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[India: Priests and Tribals Will Denounce the Violence of New Delhi Against Tribals](#) **At the WSF in Brazil, beginning on January 27, the Indian delegation intends to recount how the state deprives tribals of their ancestral land, favoring multinational companies, and the danger of Hindu fundamentalism. The testimony of some of the participants.** New Delhi (AsiaNews) " A denial of the very existence of the aborigines, and therefore of their rights to their land, of which they are deprived, even by force, in favor of multinational companies, a denial of respect for their culture and their right to food, a denial of their religion and forced conversion to Hinduism. These are some of the accusations that Indian priests and tribals are issuing against the Indian government, and will be presented at the eighth World Social Forum, a meeting of nongovernmental groups for the purpose of exchanging experiences and advancing proposals to create a more democratic, fair, and united world. The meeting will be held from January 27 to March 1, in Belem (Brazil). The abuses suffered by the indigenous will be reported at the meeting by representatives of the justice and peace commission of the Indian Catholic bishops conference. AsiaNews talked with some of the delegates. The Capuchin friar Nithiya, executive secretary of the commission, says that "all over the world, indigenous people have a right to their land. At the international level, India has consistently denied that India has indigenous people, they refer to the Adivasis as Vanvasis, and this frees them from them from the international law that legitimizes the right to land of the indigenous people and cannot be alienated. In India " Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Orissa and parts of Madhya Pradesh " are vast tribal lands belonging

to our aboriginal people, or Adivasi people, which means indigenous people. Land was central and crucial in the tribal worldview. Culture, religion, history, spirituality and even the Sacred Being cannot be conceived without land. By attributing the label Vanvasi, or people of the forest, the administration is denying these Indian indigenous people their basic human right to land. Tribals land is linked to their identity; hence land alienation leads to a loss of identity. Industrialists have brought huge amounts of tribal land, and are exploiting the natural resources, which cannot be renewed. The problem has two dimensions. First, the tribals are duped out of their landholdings. Second, the families thus rendered landless are then forced to encroach further into the forests. Another even more pressing problem is the saffronization or Hinduization of these tribals. These tribals are even being alienated from their religious identity " they are not Hindus.œWe have a scheduled visit to the indigenous communities in the Amazon and two days in Rio de Janeiro, to have exposure to the indigenous people in that area. The right to food is an important aspect to be considered.Fr. Xavier Jeyaraj (in the photo) is secretary for social action for the Jesuits, and is leading a group of 29 delegates from India, including tribals and Dalits. He tells AsiaNews that œthe government denies the indigenous status of the tribals in India. Calling the tribals "scheduled tribes is an injustice done to the people even in the constitution. It needs to be fought in a collective way. The same goes for the Dalits, who have been denied their basic human rights in many ways. In India, economic advantages, jobs, and free education are granted on the basis of membership in a particular ethnic group. For this reason, classifying a community as part of one group rather than another can lead to the loss or recognition of important rights.œThe problems of tribals in India or the indigenous people in Brazil or any other Latin American countries is very similar, Fr. Xavier continues. œOur effort is to recognize the struggles of the indigenous all over the world and to join hands with them in the first step. Such collective consensus building on the issues of tribals / indigenous people, reflection with them is necessary. The result may not be visible immediately, but building the peoples power to speak truth to power at various levels, in the state and in the centre, is a must.Fr. Xavier also intends to denounce, at the WSF: œA) Alienation of natural resources, particularly land, forest, water etc from the tribals in the name of so-called "development. We call this "developmental terrorism that is going on in the country. We will highlight various ways in which the people have been displaced and are terrorised to leave their land for industries and multinational corporations. B) The economic and political fundamentalism that uses religion to divide people. The attack on the minorities (Christians in Orissa) and the causes behind such attacks. The state has been a mute spectator in all this. C) The Dalit atrocities and human rights violations against the marginalised community.

" Hat tip: C. Cantoni

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[Indonesia: Police Most Corrupt Institution, Report Says](#)Jakarta, 22 Jan. (AKI/The Jakarta Post) " The Indonesian police force is seen by the business community as the most bribe-riddled institution, while corruption at judicial institutions is the most costly, according to a survey.The survey, conducted by Transparency International Indonesia (TII), said most respondents considered bribery necessary to smooth out bureaucracy, obtain business permits and contracts, and win favourable court decisions.TII research and policy manager Frenky Simanjuntak said 48 percent of respondents admitted to paying an average of over Rp 2.2 million (US\$200) to bribe police officers.The police had also booked first place in TIIs 2007 survey, with a corruption perception index of 4.2.National Police spokesman Insp. Gen. Abubakar Nataprawira questioned the methodology used in the survey. œOf course we respect the results and are going to use it to improve ourselves, but the sole question is what methodology is used for the survey? he said.Coming second in terms of the occurrence of graft was the customs and excise office, followed by the immigration office and municipal administrations, according to the 2008 survey.While courts rated better in the occurrence of bribes, the average bribe paid was Rp 112.4 million per deal " the highest value among the institutions in the survey.œThe amount of money has provided us with a clear reason to doubt the judiciarys willingness to reform and improve its performance, Frenky said.TII also listed Yogyakarta as the least corrupt city in Indonesia, followed by Palangkaraya in Central Kalimantan and Banda Aceh in Aceh province, while Kupang in East Nusa Tenggara was rated the worst.The survey also said out of 1,074 public servants who were asked whether they would accept bribes, only 58 percent said they were certain they would not accept one.œMany civil servants are starting to feel insecure whenever we bring up programs that may require firm punishment if they fail to accomplish them, said Wiharto of the State Ministry for Administrative Reforms.The study was conducted by Transparency International Indonesia between September and December 2008, and involved 3,841 respondents, mainly business executives.

" Hat tip: C. Cantoni

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[London Attacks 'Plotter Questioned in Pakistan'](#) ISLAMABAD: Intelligence agents on Thursday interrogated a senior Saudi al-Qaeda suspect who was captured in a joint Pakistani-CIA raid and allegedly plotted the 2005 attacks that killed 52 people in London. The operative, named by Pakistani security officials as Zabi ul Taifi, was arrested with six other Afghan and Pakistani suspects when security forces stormed a militant den on Wednesday on the outskirts of Peshawar. Adviser on Interior Rehman Malik told reporters two æhigh-value targets were among the seized in the raid, but gave no names. æThe operation was conducted jointly by Pakistani intelligence and officials from the Central Intelligence Agency, a security official told AFP. Local officials said American investigators had been present at the time of the operation while an unmanned surveillance plane flew overhead. æThe suspect has been shifted to Islamabad for interrogation, one senior Pakistani security official said..

" Hat tip: VH

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[Over 170 Schools Bombed, Burned Down by Taliban](#) More than 170 schools in Pakistan have been blown up or burned down in the past two years, the UN Childrens agency said Friday, in attacks blamed on Taliban extremists. æUNICEF condemns these attacks which rob children of their basic right to education and have a devastating impact on their lives, said Daniel Toole, UNICEFs regional director for South Asia. æAttacks that target schools, educational institutions, children and teachers are unacceptable and must cease immediately, Toole added. In one incident last week in the northwestern Swat valley, five schools were blown up. The attacks particularly targeted girls schools in the countrys Federally Administered Tribal Area and the North West Frontier Province, UNICEF said. Many other schools had been forced to close after being occupied by armed groups or security forces or because female teachers had been threatened, it added. æSchools must be safe spaces for children. UNICEF calls on all groups, and particularly the government of Pakistan, to intensify efforts to protect schools, students and teachers, Toole said. Last week officials said tens of thousands of students in the Swat valley were facing a year without classes after a local Taliban commander in December threatened to kill any girls attending classes after January 15, and to blow up any schools where girls were enrolled. As a result, about 400 private schools are unlikely to open their doors next month after winter holidays.

" Hat tip: VH

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[Pak Flaunts Its All Weather Ties With China](#) A day after the Barack Obama administration warned Pakistan that it would be held accountable for security along the Pak-Afghan border, Pakistan seemed to cosy up to China as its foreign minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi flaunted its æall weather alliance with China by saying that Islamabad had given a æblank cheque to Beijing to negotiate on its behalf with India. Qureshi said he had told Chinese envoy He Yafei, also Chinas vice-foreign minister, to ægo to India and you have a blank cheque from us. He said he had conveyed to Yafei that Islamabad would endorse whatever China told New Delhi on Pakistans behalf. The statement, which was made by Qureshi during a reception at the Chinese embassy in Islamabad, has raised question marks over Yafeis visit to India on January 5 because New Delhi has gone out of its way to ensure that China did not act as mediator. Yafei had visited Pakistan on December 29 and wanted to visit New Delhi directly from Islamabad. New Delhi, however, did not allow this, fearing that it would give the impression that China was trying to mediate between the two countries. Yafei later came to New Delhi on January 5 and advised India to continue the dialogue process with Pakistan. æWe have complete trust, mutual understanding and convergence of views on bilateral, regional and international issues, Qureshi said, adding that Pakistans ties with China would flourish in the days ahead. There was no official reaction from the foreign ministry in New Delhi, but a senior official said there was no question of China playing mediator and what Qureshi had said was his flight of imagination. The White House in a foreign policy document released soon after Barack Obama took over as President had said that while non-military aid to Pakistan would be increased, Islamabad would be held accountable for security along the Pak-Afghan border. Pakistans ambassador to the US Hussain Haqqani had threatened to review options if US did not follow the right approach. However, in what may not please Pakistan as much, Afghanistans foreign minister Rangin Dadfar Spanta said late on Wednesday that India and Afghanistan were victims of terrorism which emanated from the same source and that there were certain entities in the region who used terrorism as a tool for foreign policy. æAfghanistan believes there are some entities in our region that are using terrorism as a tool for foreign policy. We have to end this. We share your pain, the pain of the Indian people because Afghanistan is the victim of same terror with same sources, Spanta said after a meeting with foreign minister Pranab Mukherjee in Kabul. Mukherjee is on a two-day visit to Afghanistan.

" Hat tip: VH

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[Pakistan Holding Suspect in London Train Bombings](#)

ISLAMABAD, Jan. 22 " Acting on a tip from U.S. and Pakistani intelligence agents, Pakistani security forces arrested a suspected al-Qaeda operative linked to the 2005 train bombings in London, two Pakistani officials said Thursday. Zabi ul Taifi, a Saudi national, was one of seven suspects arrested in an early morning raid Wednesday near the northwest city of Peshawar. Several officers with the paramilitary Pakistani Frontier Corps found Taifi and the six others in a compound in the tribal area town of Bara, according to a Pakistani intelligence official and a Pakistani political official.

" Hat tip: JD

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[South Korea: Deadly Fire Caused by Squatters Makeshift Bombs: Prosecutors](#)

Prosecutors concluded Thursday that a deadly fire that took six lives during a clash between police and demonstrators was caused by makeshift bombs prepared by the protesters. The fire erupted on Tuesday at a building rooftop in Yongsan, central Seoul, during a crackdown by police commandos on a group of squatters staging a sit-in against an urban redevelopment project in the area. The blaze killed six people, including a police officer, and left more than 20 injured.

" Hat tip: Tuan Jim

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[Chinese Seamen Rewarded for Saving Ship From Pirates](#)

A Shanghai shipping company has rewarded 30 of its seamen with 10,000 U.S. dollars each after they successfully fought off a pirate attack off Somalia in the Gulf of Aden. Each crew member of the cargo ship, Zhenhua 4, was being rewarded for their bravery and courage, said Guan Tongxian, president of Shanghai Zhenhua Port Machinery Co. The crew received the reward in a commendation ceremony at Changxing Island Port, after their vessel returned to Shanghai on Thursday morning to be welcomed by crowds of people. Nine pirates armed with rocket launchers and heavy machine guns boarded the ship on Dec. 17. The crew locked themselves in cabins, using fire hoses and self-made firebombs to keep the attackers at bay for six hours. Foreign warships and helicopters were contacted and helped Chinese seamen beat back the pirates later. No one was injured in the attack. Captain Peng Weiyuan, 57, attributed their success to careful training. Peng began a drill to fend off a possible pirate attack 10 days before the ship entered the Somali waters. China sent two navy destroyers and a supply ship to the Gulf of Aden on Dec. 26 to protect Chinese civilian vessels and crews, including those from Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan, and foreign vessels on request. The vessels arrived in the gulf on Jan. 6.

" Hat tip: VH

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[38 Egyptians Repatriated From Lampedusa](#)

(ANSAmEd) " ROME, JANUARY 22 " Some 38 Egyptian citizens who had landed in recent days on Lampedusa were repatriated via charter flight last night. The foreigners escort was guaranteed by Egyptian security operators supplied by airline company Egyptair. The repatriation shows that the policy of collaboration with the African countries of the Mediterranean is going ahead, said the Police. Further repatriations are expected in the coming days. (ANSAmEd).

" Hat tip: Insubria

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[Algeria: Kids Challenge the Sea for Italy](#)

(by Laura De Santi) (ANSAmEd)- ALGIERS, JANUARY 21 " Despite the bad weather hitting the Algerian coast, departures of the "Harraga (Algerian for those who burn the borders) trying to cross the Mediterranean to reach Europe have not stopped. Seventeen Algerian migrants arrested at sea a few days ago have started the count for 2009, while last years numbers speak clearly. Neither death nor new Algerian laws that make illegal immigration a crime will get in the way of their dreams of finding a better life. Last year, Italy passed Spain as the preferred destination for Algerian migrants or was simply the most accessible since what matters is departing, changing your life, and getting out of poverty, repeat young Algerians. According to Libert , the Algerian navy arrested 1335 (1327 of which are Algerian) last year at sea compared to 1259 arrests in 2007. Just over 1,000 migrants were stopped at sea in 2006, a black year marked by a 70% increase in arrests, compared to 335 arrests in 2005. The number of bodies pulled out of these by the navy also increased to 98 in 2008. In 2007 61 dead bodies were found off the Algerian coasts, compared to 73 in 2006, and 29 in 2005. Despite appeals from all the families in Annaba of the missing Harraga, it is impossible to obtain reliable data on the hundreds missing at sea. Investigations have been called for particularly by the Algerian League for Human Rights (Laddh) after reporting the illegal imprisonment of thousands of young Algerian migrants in prisons and secret detention centres in Libya and Tunisia, and at least 600 dead bodies in the Almeria and Alicante morgues. The

Annaba region (600km east of Algiers) is the departure point for those going to Italy and Sardinia, and according to a study by navy, is where a majority of the boats left from in 2008. Of the 1335 harraga arrested, only 636 were caught in the east, and 442 of these just in Annaba. According to the Algerian press, intensified inspections along the western coast has discouraged the use of the route between Oran (400km west of Algiers) and Spain, and has pushed those looking to immigrate to Annaba, which in a few short months has become the crossroads for these voyages of hope. According to the report, even if cases of the elderly, women, and children have drawn attention, the majority of migrants caught at sea are Algerians between 21-29 years old. In a recent poll promoted by Liberté, about 50% of the Algerians between 15 and 34 said that they are ready to depart while 81% said they know someone who is getting ready to depart. Very few migrants of other nationalities choose make the voyage: only 8 Afghans, Moroccans, Malians, and Nigerians have been arrested at sea. Morocco, with the two Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, and Libya, has the routes that are favoured by the 300 thousand sub-Saharan Africans that, according to some estimates, live in Algeria waiting to continue their journey to Europe. According to the Navy, in 2008 639 harraga were expelled and repatriated from European counties compared to 189 in 2007, and 532 in 2006. (ANSAméd).

" Hat tip: Insubria

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[*Finland: Thors: Need for Speed in Processing Asylum Seekers*](#) Immigration Minister Astrid Thors says she's concerned about crowded immigration reception centres and the current snail's pace at which asylum permits are being processed. The Minister's comments come in the wake of an explosive growth in the number of asylum seekers entering Finland since last year. Currently all detention centres in Finland are packed to capacity with authorities receiving more residents than they can officially accommodate. The large influx of refugees has created bottlenecks in the processing time, with applicants queuing for months before the first interview by police and immigration officials. Minister Thors has called for more resources for the authorities to expedite processing of residence and refugee permits. Government will consider the proposal at the end of January. More Municipal Funding Thors has also called for a higher level for municipalities hosting refugees. Many municipalities have refused to take in more refugees, because compensation paid by the state for refugees has remained at the same level since 1993. The Minister pointed out that there had been an increase in student grants, while municipalities have had to manage increasing costs with the same level of state support. The state compensates municipalities in part for expenses related to accommodation, health care and day care services. Increase in Influx of Asylum Seekers Last year the number of asylum seekers arriving in Finland jumped to 4,000, compared to 1,505 in 2007. Unstable situations in Iraq and Somalia helped push the numbers up. Interior Ministry Immigration Director Sirkku Päivärinne said that this year those numbers could increase to as much as 6,000. Refugees must reside at reception centres until they are granted a residence or asylum permit.

" Hat tip: Tuan Jim

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[*Finland: Packed Refugee Reception Centres Hope for More Funds*](#) Refugee reception centres in Finland are packed to the limit. Minister of Migration and European Affairs Astrid Thors is proposing more funds for officials working with asylum seekers. Last year 4,000 asylum seekers arrived in this country. Many of them are still waiting for their first appointment with immigration officials. For example, the Helsinki Refugee Centre is overflowing with tenants. Asylum seekers are supposed to move from this centre to another within a month. In reality, they stay much longer. There is simply no available space at any of Finland's refugee centres. Were dependent on emergency shelters, attics and classroom floors. As soon as a bed is freed up, it's filled by a refugee in Helsinki, said Leena Markkanen, the director of the Helsinki Refugee Centre. Jumale Raaho Mohamed from Somalia has been living at the centre since August. I'm very happy to stay here. But if I ask myself, I've been here a very long time, she said. Thors: More Funding Needed Asylum seekers are not allowed to move out of reception centres until they receive a residence permit. However many municipalities have refused to house new asylum seekers due to a lack of funding. State reimbursements to municipalities which house asylum seekers have not risen since 1993. Now Minister of Migration and European Affairs Astrid Thors is proposing to increase funding to assist municipalities as well as hire more immigration officials. Government is to review the proposal by the end of January. The need for additional funding is acute; this month 500 more asylum seekers arrive in Finland.

" Hat tip: Tuan Jim

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[*More Asylum Seekers to Norway*](#) More than 14,400 persons applied for asylum in Norway in 2008. This is an increase of 120 per cent from the previous year but lower than in the early 2000s, when nearly 18,000 applied for asylum in this country. Asylum seekers constitute only 13.7 per cent of newcomers to Norway. Most immigrants come to work or become reunited with their family. Around 60 per cent of the applications for asylum were turned down in 2008, against only 42 per cent the previous year. The reason for this, according to the Immigration Directorate (UDI), is mainly that that asylum seekers from Czechenia as a rule no longer receive asylum in Norway.

" Hat tip: Tuan Jim

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[*Netherlands: Liberals Call for Tougher Immigration Rules*](#) The Netherlands should refuse to give immigrants unemployment benefits unless they have lived here for 10 years and set a new age limit of 24 for migrants, opposition Liberal (VVD) leader Mark Rutte is quoted as saying in Fridays Telegraaf. Rutte made the statement during a visit to Denmark to compare immigration policies, the paper said. "Working is a much better way to integration than big integration projects, Rutte was quoted as saying. "They discovered that in Denmark a while ago. Denmark's tough immigration rules have been criticised by the European courts on several occasions because they are sometimes at odds with the free movement of people, the paper says.

" Hat tip: <http://snaphanen.dk/Steen>

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[*Spain: Andalusia, 80pct Fewer Children in 2008*](#) (ANSAméd) " MADRID, JANUARY 21 " The landings on the shores of Andalusia of children without their parents dropped by 80pct in 2008, according to the figures released by the Secretary of State for Immigration Consuelo Rumi, quoted today in the media. The reduction in the number of unaccompanied children, especially those from Morocco, is due to the signing of a agreement for prevention, protection and assisted return with the Moroccan government, currently under examination by the Moroccan Parliament and awaiting definitive approval. A cooperation agreement similar to the one in force with Morocco will be underwritten in the near future by the Spanish government with the Senegalese Justice Ministry. In 2008, according to the data outlined by Rumi, there were only 44 unaccompanied child migrants who landed on the coasts of Andalusia, 80pct fewer than those arriving in the region in 2007. Consuelo Rumi confirmed that, in 2008, there were an overall 13,555 migrants who tried to enter Spain illegally by crossing the sea on rafts or makeshift sea craft, 26pct fewer than those in 2007. According to the government representative, the reduction was due to the deterrent effect of repatriation, cooperation for development in the countries from which the migrants normally arrive, agreements made by Spain to reinforce coast surveillance and, in part, also to the economic crisis, which resulted in a decline as concerns domestic demand for immigrant workers. The confirmation lies in the fact that the number of foreign workers, according to the community rules to be contacted legally outside of Spain, is down by 94pct decline in 2009. (ANSAméd).

" Hat tip: Insubria

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[*Parents See Bias in School Pep Talks*](#) VOORHEES " The Eastern Regional High School administration targeted only black and Latino students in a series of academic pep talks last week, angering some parents who said the effort smacked of discrimination. "I wanted to know if my child is not in class, then what are they doing?" said Noni Booddie of Voorhees, one of eight parents who addressed the Eastern Camden County Regional school board Wednesday night. She and her husband, Scott, said they tried but failed to secure any adequate explanations from the school district. "That we were unable to obtain any information from the school is unacceptable, said Scott Booddie, whose daughter attends Eastern. Parents said they deserved advance notice about the pep talks. They said the events also sparked rumor-mongering as some white students speculated that their black and Latino peers were failing. Administrators described the talks as 10-minute motivational meetings held over four days during school hours. They said each was meant to encourage minority enrollment in advanced, honors and other higher-level classes. But their approach, targeting minority students and failing to inform parents, fell short, some families said. The administration required all black and Latino students to attend the gatherings " regardless of each student's individual academic performance " while white students were exempted. Eastern High counts 234 black and 65 Latino students; together, they make up about 14 percent of the student population.

" Hat tip: JD

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[Planned Parenthood: Force Doctors to Do Abortions](#)**Law firms gear up to defend right of conscience** Experts for the Alliance Defense Fund and Christian Legal Society are gearing up to defend three laws that allow medical professionals to follow their conscience and not participate in abortions. æ Medical professionals should not be forced to perform abortions against their conscience, said Casey Mattox, who is litigation counsel with the CLSs Center for Law & Religious Freedom. æ Planned Parenthood, the ACLU and their pro-abortion allies are seeking to punish pro-life medical professionals for their beliefs, Mattox said. æ Far from arguing for ~choice, these lawsuits seek to compel health care workers to perform abortions or face dire consequences. The law firms have filed motions to intervene in three separate lawsuits that seek to invalidate a federal law protecting medical professionals from discrimination because they refuse to participate in abortions.

" Hat tip: JD

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[UK: Tribunal: ~Gay Rights Trump Christianity](#)**Counselor wins reinstatement, but on procedural grounds** A tribunal has ruled that a Christian counselor was wrongfully dismissed from his position after the issue of offering sexual advice to homosexuals was raised, but the decision was based on procedural grounds by the judges who rejected his claim of religious discrimination. Essentially, the ruling from the Bristol Employment Tribunal in the United Kingdom found that Gary McFarlane, a relationship counselor with the company Relate Avon, was improperly dismissed but it also rejected his claim of religious discrimination. The result is a disorganized precedent that should be addressed, according to Andrea Minichiello Williams, of the Christian Legal Center, which worked on McFarlane's case. æ The law is in a confused state; in the case of Lillian Ladele, the Islington registrar, the court held that Christian belief must give way to the rights of same sex couples; but in the case of Gary McFarlane there is a finding of wrongful dismissal, Williams said. æ The courts and public are confused; we call on the government to recognize the legitimate expression of conscience by Christians in the area of sexual orientation and provide protection where necessary.

" Hat tip: JD

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[TV Crew Expelled From UN Meeting on Freedom of Expression](#)**The journalists were working on a documentary on how the issue of human rights is debated at the United Nations.** Geneva " A television production crew was expelled Thursday from a United Nations meeting discussing freedom of expression and defamation of religions. Two journalists from the French-German cultural channel ARTE were asked to leave a meeting room at the UNs European headquarters during a public session of a human rights body preparing for a racism conference in South Africa later this year. According to a diplomatic source, the expulsion announced by the chairman of the session, Russian representative Yuri Boychenko, was requested by the Organisation of Islamic Conference and by the African group of states. æ It is regrettable that he was not informed of the procedures that allow a public session to become a private one, Marie Heuze, chief spokeswoman at the UN in Geneva said. The expulsion took place when the debate was raging on freedom of expression and the defamation of religions, two issues which are proving particularly sensitive in a proposed declaration for the conference in Durban, South Africa. According to Muslim participants, human rights should take into account defamation of religions, while the Europeans are opposed to its inclusion. A British delegate said any mention of this concept in the resolution æ damages the prospects of a successful conference in Durban. According to a diplomatic source, at least three European countries " Britain, Denmark and the Netherlands, have threatened to boycott the conference if the resolution is accepted. The United States, Canada and Israel have already said they would not attend the event, which is scheduled to take place April 20 to 24. The earlier 2001 Durban conference on racism, held just a few days before the September 11 attacks on the United States and against the backdrop of the second Palestinian intifada, ended in acrimony amid accusations of anti-Semitism.

" Hat tip: <http://greenspiece.blogspot.com/> [Paul Green

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