

March 17th – March 24th

AMERICAN POLITICS

2. The Home Front; Economist, No author given - 3/18
3. Misunderstanding the Threat?; Economist, No author given - 3/18
4. Cantankerous Conservatism; Weekly Standard, By Fred Barnes - 3/20
6. The Mission: Find a Way to Stay Relevant; Time, By Mike Allen - 3/20
7. Iraq-War Vets: The Democrats' Newest Weapon; Time, By Joe Klein - 3/20
8. The Last Word: John Edwards--'Real Moral Leadership'; Newsweek International, By Malcolm Beith - 3/20
9. How It's Looking; National Review, No author given - 3/21
13. A 'Third Term' for Bush; Daily Standard, By Fred Barnes - 3/21

IRAN

15. Hitting Iran; National Review, By William F. Buckley Jr. - 3/17
16. Truth or Dare in Tehran; U.S. News & World Report, By Thomas Omestad - 3/20
16. A Concert that Cannot be Held in Tehran; National Review, By Travis Kavulla - 3/20

IRAQ

18. More Pain, No Gain; Economist, No author given - 3/18
19. Hurry Up and Wait; Weekly Standard, By Max Boot - 3/20
21. Not Civil War, Not Yet, But...; U.S. News & World Report, By Kevin Whitelaw, Amer Saleh and Ben Gilbert - 3/20
23. Can He Make Peace Bloom?; Time, By Aparisim Ghosh - 3/20
25. Sistani and the Democracy Project; National Review, By Andrew C. McCarthy - 3/20
27. The Other Side of the Story; National Review, By Bill Crawford - 3/20
34. Republic of Fear; Daily Standard, By Dan Darling - 3/21

ISRAEL

35. You're Nicked – Again; Economist, No author given -3/18
36. The Shape of Things to Come; Economist, No author given - 3/18

HAMAS

37. In No Uncertain Terms; U.S. News & World Report, By Mortimer B. Zuckerman - 3/20
38. Fixing the Potholes; Newsweek International, By Kevin Peraino - 3/20
39. PA Confidential; New Republic, By Efraim Halevy - 3/20

AFGHANI STAN

42. A Fragile Corner of Order; Economist, No author given - 3/18

SAUDI ARABIA

42. Coming Back to School; Time, By Jeff Chu - 3/20

MIDDLE EAST ECONOMICS

44. Down in the Dunes; Economist, No author given - 3/18

AMERICAN POLITICS

The Home Front

Economist

No author given

3/18

Stung by complaints that the media report only bad news from Iraq, the ABC News Baghdad bureau went looking for something cheerful. Its reporters found a new romantic television comedy, "starring the Danny DeVito of Iraq". Sadly, while they were recording this upbeat tale, they were interrupted by the news that the impresario behind the show had just been shot dead.

There are two lessons one might draw from this unfunny episode. One is that Iraq is as big a mess as the evening news makes it look. The other is that the terrorists have learned to pick targets that will generate maximum news coverage. No prizes for guessing which thesis George Bush prefers. "The terrorists are losing on the field of battle, so they are fighting this war through the pictures we see on television," he said on March 13th, the same day the ABC story aired. "They're hoping to shake our resolve."

This weekend marks the third anniversary of the invasion of Iraq. The war is now decidedly unpopular, but Mr Bush's resolve appears unshaken. His mission remains "to defeat terror by promoting democracy," he announced on March 13th. Three days later, a new version of the National Security Strategy promised that America would be "idealistic about goals and realistic about means". The strategy paid more attention to working with allies than its notorious predecessor did in 2002, but it reaffirmed two of Mr Bush's core beliefs—the need to spread democracy and the usefulness of pre-emptive action against hostile states with WMDs.

In his speech on March 13th, Mr Bush tried to reassure Americans about two particular concerns. The first is the worry that Iraq is moving towards a civil war (see page 55). He acknowledged, more than usual, the setbacks his mission has suffered in Iraq, such as the bombing of the Askariya shrine, one of Shia Islam's holiest sites. But he claimed that Iraqis have "looked into the abyss" and chosen to oppose the violent minority in their midst.

He boasted how it was the Iraqi security forces, not coalition forces, who restored order after the Askariya bombing. The new Iraqi army now has "primary responsibility" for more than 30,000 square miles of Iraq, said Mr Bush—a threefold increase since the beginning of the year. By the end of this year, Iraqi troops should control more territory than the coalition. And he stressed how the security forces, currently dominated by Shias, were trying to recruit more Sunni Arabs.

The other issue that Mr Bush tried to deal with is one much anguished about in the American press—the challenge of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) which have killed so many troops in Iraq. Mr Bush argued that because IEDs now kill far more Iraqis than Americans, Iraqis are starting to inform on the bombers. The number of tips from Iraqis grew from 400 last March to more than 4,000 in December, said Mr Bush. Thanks to better intelligence and better anti-bomb technology, nearly half of the IEDs in Iraq are disabled before they explode, and the casualty rate has halved in the past 18 months.

In a significant aside, Mr Bush added that some of the most powerful bombs were "clearly produced in Iran". He gave warning that "such actions—along with Iran's support for terrorism and its pursuit of nuclear weapons—are increasingly isolating Iran, and America will continue to rally the world to confront these threats."

It was a competent speech, and doubtless reassured some of Mr Bush's wavering supporters. But they are a minority. A Gallup poll released this week found that only 38% of Americans think the war in Iraq is going well, down from 46% in January. Only 32% think Mr Bush has a clear plan for handling the situation. Even fewer (25%) think the Democratic Party has a clear plan. But more think that Democrats would do a better job of handling Iraq (48%) than Republicans (40%).

Mr Bush's critics include both those who opposed the war in principle and those who wish he had prosecuted it more skilfully. Both groups are swayed by continuing spectacular atrocities in Iraq and impassioned criticism at home. Around the time of Mr Bush's speech more than 80 bodies were found dumped around Baghdad, mostly of men who had been bound and shot or throttled with rope.

The day before, Joe Biden, a centrist Democratic senator with a strong record on foreign affairs, predicted that if Iraqi politicians cannot form a unified government in the next six to eight weeks, the country will move closer to civil war. He added that this might even become a regional war, and lambasted the president for making speeches at home rather than getting on a plane and drumming up international pressure on Iraqi factions "to make the concessions that are needed."

In Bush-bashing terms, that still puts Mr Biden some way behind the current darling of the left, Russ Feingold (see next story). But other would-be presidential candidates have started offering the president reams of unsolicited advice. "It's absolutely critical that we reduce the size of the American presence" in Iraq, insisted John Edwards, who is courting the same activists as Mr Feingold. The former vice-presidential candidate wants a cut of at least 40,000 troops.

Yet most utterances from the Democrats are considerably vaguer. Barack Obama, a popular new senator from Illinois, said that "this year should be the year in which we start withdrawing our troops" (a position not necessarily at odds with Mr Bush's). He also suggested that America's security would be improved if it achieved "energy independence" (ditto), though strangely he stopped short of calling for oil-drilling in Alaska.

Top Republicans, meanwhile, are inclined to rally round a wartime president, but nervous that Americans might collectively lose their nerve. "We have to be realistic, but let's not get everyone so depressed that it's definitely going to fail," said George Allen, a Virginia senator and presidential aspirant. Jack Kemp, a former vice-presidential nominee, thinks America could help the political process in Iraq by promising to be out by 2009 or the end of 2008, leaving no military bases behind.

Meanwhile, the foreign-policy commentariat is offering a wide variety of detailed game-plans for success, or at least for averting disaster. For instance, one of the war's main cheerleaders, Kenneth Pollack of the Brookings Institution, recommends securing the calmest parts of Iraq first, rather than concentrating American forces in Sunni Arab areas where the insurgency is strongest. That way, he argues, more Iraqis can establish normal lives more quickly. Political power and oil revenues should be decentralised, he says, and some powers transferred to a UN high commissioner, as happened in Bosnia.

By contrast, in the latest Foreign Affairs Stephen Biddle of the Council on Foreign Relations urges America to concentrate on brokering a compromise between the Kurds and Shia and Sunni Arabs by threatening to manipulate the military balance of power between them. To force the Sunnis to the negotiating table, America must threaten to arm and train a Shia-Kurdish army. To force the Shias and Kurds to compromise, it must threaten to pull out of Iraq prematurely, or back the Sunnis. Mr Biddle admits that such a radical shift from idealism to realpolitik would be "a challenge" to explain to American voters.

Indeed it would. Gallup says that two-thirds of Americans think history will judge Mr Bush by his record in Iraq. But he already knew that. So he has little choice but to press on, in the hope of finishing what he started.

Misunderstanding the Threat?

Economist

No author given

3/18

If the terrorist atrocities of September 11th 2001 changed the world, the consequent invasion of Iraq by American and British forces, which began on March 19th 2003, will surely mark a change in American thinking about how best to conduct the country's foreign policy. Whatever the eventual outcome in Iraq and the wider Middle East, the three years since the invasion have been a debacle: a tragedy for the tens of thousands of Iraqis killed in the invasion and during the insurgency and near-civil-war that has ensued; a humiliation for those Americans, generally termed neoconservatives, who thought the invading troops would be greeted as liberators and that the Iraqi people would move smilingly and swiftly to democracy.

That, at least, is what Francis Fukuyama argues in his new book. A scholar, now at Johns Hopkins

University in Washington, DC, Mr Fukuyama became famous in 1992 for "The End of History and the Last Man", a book which now leaves him constantly having to point out that he did not argue that after the cold war's end all conflict would cease, but rather that it would lose its ideological character. His fame made him a sought-after adviser and pundit, and drew him close to the neoconservative strand in American thinking.

Epitomised now in most people's minds by Paul Wolfowitz, deputy defence secretary in George Bush's first term, but more accurately by writers such as William Kristol and Robert Kagan, neoconservatives came to believe that American power should be used for moral purposes, that democracy and human rights in other countries were a legitimate foreign-policy concern, but that international law and institutions were generally unable to solve serious security problems. This strand of thinking blended some fairly left-wing elements with a right-wing belief in the use of military power and in America's exceptional legitimacy. In 1998, this made Mr Fukuyama himself an advocate of punitive action against Saddam Hussein.

By 2003, however, he had changed his mind. He opposed the invasion and has since argued publicly with prominent neoconservatives. In "America at the Crossroads" he claims that the invasion contradicted a basic neoconservative principle: that large social-engineering projects (ie, state-building) often lead to unexpected consequences and undermine their own ends. And he believes the case for the invasion was based on a false premise: no, not the idea that Saddam had weapons of mass destruction but rather the notion that the threat from al-Qaeda was linked to Middle East tyranny and WMDs.

The second of those views is more interesting than the first. The idea that it is hard to rebuild state institutions and what is now obscurely known as civil society is both true and unhelpful: unless you conclude from it that America should avoid foreign entanglements altogether, as the neoconservatives emphatically do not, it is of little operational use. In Iraq, the Bush administration clearly underestimated what was required and proved incompetent in implementing even its own limited plans. But that observation could just as well lead you to conclude that it is wrong to attempt such things on the cheap as that it is wrong to do them at all.

Mr Fukuyama's bolder claim is that the attempt in Iraq was unnecessary because it was irrelevant to the actual threat America faced. His argument is that the true threat posed by Islamic militants is not large-scale confrontation rooted in the troubles of the Middle East. It is smaller and more fragmented, and arises from Muslim alienation within European and American societies. In other words, it is a problem of the lack of integration of Muslims within those societies, not something that can be solved by a transformation of Arab or other Muslim countries into democracies. The idea that the ultimate threat thus posed is of nuclear or other WMD terrorism, with weapons supplied perhaps by a hostile Muslim country, was absurdly overblown, he thinks.

Having come to that conclusion, Mr Fukuyama recommends that to deal with the true threat, as well as to clear up the mess caused by the invasion of Iraq, America needs a complete foreign-policy change. His recipe is "realistic Wilsonianism", by which he means idealism about human rights modelled on that of Woodrow Wilson, combined with more use of multilateral methods and less use of the military.

To play up multilateralism and to play down military power is now more or less what the chastened Bush administration is anyway doing. But is Mr Fukuyama's premise about the true threat correct? It is a view that it is easier to take outside government than within it. No one will know whether the threat of nuclear terrorism is overrated until a terrorist has tried it. And the idea that the threat is basically internal, given that the September 11th hijackers studied in Europe, misses the fact that Osama bin Laden and his henchmen are from the Middle East and had their training camps in Sudan and then Afghanistan. Mr Fukuyama's critique of the mistakes that have been made is a powerful one. But could the team in the White House on September 11th have been as sanguine about the threat as he is? Could any successor, whether Democrat or Republican?

Cantankerous Conservatism

Weekly Standard

By Fred Barnes

3/20

Patrick Buchanan, commentator and former presidential candidate, looked over the issues on the political agenda in 2006 and liked what he saw. It was a paleoconservative's delight. There was the Dubai ports deal, rejected by a congressional uprising part nationalistic, part isolationist. There's immigration, soon to be debated on the Senate floor and always high on the paleocon list of concerns. Excessive government spending, a worry of all conservatives but especially paleocons, is a major topic this year. And the intervention in Iraq and President Bush's crusade for democracy face sharp criticism, with paleocons in the lead among the critics.

It's a paleo moment in America. "It's a little bit late," Buchanan says. He'd rather it had occurred in 1992 or 1996, when he ran for the Republican presidential nomination, or in 2000, when he ran as the Reform party candidate. Chances are, the moment won't last. But it's a moment that could be politically painful for the president and harmful to Republicans in the midterm election in November. The paleocon message is not an electoral winner--unless you believe voters are eager to hear ideas that are gloomy, negative, defeatist, isolationist, nativist, and protectionist.

Buchanan is the big dog among paleocons. His message, were he to run again for president, he told me, would be: "Secure the borders, stop exporting jobs, and bring the troops home" from Iraq. I'm afraid many would interpret that message: Keep Mexicans out, forget free markets and free trade, and shrink America's role in the world. That's not an optimistic message.

It's not that these views are illegitimate. They're part--a small part--of the broad conservative coalition in America. And paleocons themselves are easily gathered under the big tent of the Republican party. The problem comes when they influence the party in ways that threaten the narrow Republican majority.

And they do this in several ways. One is to attack Bush on issue after issue. This weakens the Republican base and, potentially at least, reduces voter turnout. Republican voters dismiss criticism by Democrats or the media, but they pay attention when other Republicans zing Bush, or when they attack congressional Republicans, for that matter.

A larger threat is the paleocon influence on one of the touchiest issues, immigration. Here, their thinking is reflected in the anti-immigrant rhetoric of some congressional Republicans. And it is such thinking that imperils the gains made by Republicans among Hispanic voters.

In the immigration bill passed by the House last December, there was a distinct nativist streak. It calls for the raising of a 700-mile fence along America's southwest border with Mexico and for stepped-up border security in general. It was Buchanan who popularized the fence idea, and now a Republican senator intends to propose a fence along the entire border, from the Pacific Ocean to the Gulf of Mexico.

How would such a fence play politically? Well, it's a horrible symbol, one that clashes with the welcome mat laid out by the Statue of Liberty in New York Harbor. More important, it says to Mexican-Americans: We don't want any more people like you coming into our country.

The political problem is the effect all of this, including the congressional debate itself, is likely to have on Hispanic voters. They are a critical part of the Republican majority. In fact, without them, there would be no Republican majority. Bush lifted the percentage of Hispanics who voted Republican from 35 percent in 2000 to 44 percent in 2004.

Grover Norquist, the conservative activist and head of Americans for Tax Reform, says holding Hispanic voters is crucial. "I think the Republican party wins and runs the country for the next 25 years if we are perceived as pro-immigrant and respectful of immigrants," he says. "The only way we lose majority status is to treat Hispanics the way we treated Catholics in the 1880s."

So, if all goes well, the Republican party is on the way to claiming a majority of Hispanics, the fastest growing voting bloc in the country. A paleocon-inspired immigration bill would jeopardize this. Democrats recognize this. Senator Hillary Clinton of New York and other Democrats are already attacking the House bill, saying it would create a police state focused on Hispanics.

On the Dubai ports deal, paleocons were leading voices of opposition. On Iraq and the campaign for democracy, they reject Bush's optimism about rolling back the dictatorships of the Middle East. Instead, they take the pessimistic view that the Middle East is unchangeable, Arab culture being what

it is.

Jump to the November election. What Republicans need more than anything else is unity. They have it when Bush's poll numbers are up. They don't when his approval rating tumbles--and it drops all the more when Republicans are criticizing him. With their issues unusually prominent this year, paleocons are likely to be critical. And the mainstream media likes nothing more than to play up conservatives who attack other conservatives.

As for Buchanan, he says he's "thought about" running for president again in 2008. But he's overcome the "temptation" and "probably" won't run. He's not impressed with the current field of Republican presidential candidates. "The field is vanilla," he says. Which means there's no paleocon in the hunt.

-- Fred Barnes is executive editor of The Weekly Standard.

The Mission: Find a Way to Stay Relevant

Time

By Mike Allen

3/20

After stepping off Air Force One in Atlanta last week and boarding a cherry red Ford Expedition near the front of President George W. Bush's motorcade, Karl Rove rolled down his window and leaned out to talk to a clump of Georgia Congressmen who had followed him across the tarmac and were looking for a ride. "Keep going!" the White House deputy chief of staff instructed the group, motioning them toward the gray staff vans farther back.

Rove was being playful, but he might as well have been rehearsing the motto for this battered White House, where change remains suspect, momentum is elusive and patience seems to be the only prescription. Just 16 months after the President's re-election, his Capitol Hill allies are in a funk, pointing fingers and worrying about their survival in November's midterm elections. Even Bush loyalists fear the Commander in Chief is in a hole with no ladder. When the Dubai company that the Administration had okayed to run several U.S. ports pulled out of the widely derided deal last week, the President escaped from a fight with a Republican-controlled Congress that had the public overwhelmingly on its side. In the long run, though, the company's withdrawal may turn out to mark the moment Bush became a lame duck. "The ports deal showed that the Congress is completely going its own way," said a presidential adviser. White House officials contend that Bush quickly realized the ports affair was a fiasco. "I know a prairie fire when I see one," the Texas rancher told an aide. The most politically injurious fallout could be new constraints on Bush's ability to play what had been his strong card--his national-security credentials.

In an acknowledgment that he needs to offer a more convincing message on Iraq, the President is scheduled to deliver a series of three speeches this month that aim at persuasion, a departure from his usual hallmark of repetition. Bush plans to describe U.S. efforts to develop new defenses against insurgents' improvised explosive devices and give town-by-town case studies of how his strategy for victory in Iraq is playing out. "It's not going to change people's anxieties," a White House official said. "What it will do is help provide a greater understanding of why these events are happening and what we're doing to try to change them. We talk about the strategy oftentimes from 30,000 feet. What we're trying to do here is say how it is actually being applied on the ground."

With little hope of getting much legislation passed in an election year, Bush plans to stay relevant through an aggressive schedule of fund raising and rally stops for Republican candidates, most of whom are still eager for presidential visits. One Bush adviser sees political promise for the President in a nuclear peril. "Certainly, there's going to be a serious showdown on Iran," he said. "He's very relevant on that, and that may help his numbers a little bit."

Through the challenges, the President has kept his human touch. Touring New Orleans last week, he met a man who had survived for days on canned goods before being evacuated to Utah. "Were you the only black man in Salt Lake City?" Bush asked. Meanwhile, lobbyists and outside Republican strategists are pleading anew for a White House shake-up, arguing that if this were a business, the management would be thrown out. "The Bushies have proved that five people can run the country for four years and one day," a G.O.P. congressional aide complained. The critics are conducting their conversations with

the President's men in polite code, such as asking how they can help. "There is a drumbeat," a Bush friend explained, "but it's not resonant in the White House. These are people this Administration, and the President in particular, disdains. You scrape 'em off your shoes--and keep going."

The Dubai firm's withdrawal may turn out to mark the moment Bush became a lame-duck President.

Iraq-War Vets: The Democrats' Newest Weapon

Time

By Joe Klein

3/20

This is Karl Rove's worst nightmare: a large crowd has gathered in a restaurant in the small town of Montrose, Pa., on a sunny Sunday afternoon in February to listen to the Democratic candidate running in the 10th Congressional District, a rural conservative bastion considered "safe" for Republicans. The candidate, Chris Carney, is soft-spoken and well informed. The audience is enthusiastic and predominantly Democratic, but peppered with Republicans who seem every bit as angry about the Bush Administration as do the Democrats. One man, dressed in a jacket and tie, stands up and confesses he's a lifelong Republican who can't vote for Bush because of his "fiscal irresponsibility." Another Republican, a prohibitively large corrections officer named Gary Morgan, tells me he's disgusted by the way Bush has prosecuted the war in Iraq and by his party's "culture of corruption." He's impressed by Carney, a Navy Reserve intelligence officer who is also a college professor. "It's nice to be able to vote for somebody with honor and integrity, and a veteran."

The "honor and integrity" sentiment is echoed by many in the crowd, and it is a local reference. The incumbent Republican Congressman Don Sherwood, 65--whom the Democrats didn't even bother to oppose in the last two elections--is married and has three children, but he's best known for admitting last year, according to the Wilkes-Barre Times Leader, to a "five-year affair with a 29-year-old Maryland woman, but denies repeatedly beating her." At one point, the woman locked herself in the Congressman's bathroom and called 911, claiming that he was trying to choke her. Sherwood said he was just giving her a back rub. The woman brought suit, and Sherwood settled out of court. A former teacher named Kathy Scott last week announced she would challenge Sherwood in the Republican primary because he "is not living his personal life in a way that's honest and moral."

Sherwood's when-did-you-stop-beating-your-mistress travails may have made this race competitive for Democrats, but Chris Carney's qualities as a candidate are what make it significant. He is one of more than 50 veterans running for Congress as Democrats this year, eight of whom are Iraq-combat veterans. Carney didn't see action in Iraq, but he was a senior intelligence analyst who served in the Office of the Secretary of Defense. Indeed, he was one of a core group of military-intelligence officers who studied the Iraqi insurgency over the past three years and have been frustrated by the Bush Administration's failure to bring adequate force to meet the challenge. "We told them there was going to be an insurgency," Carney tells his audience in Montrose. "Did they prepare for it? No. We need to know why they didn't. Why wasn't Congress asking the tough questions about this war? Where was Mr. Sherwood?"

The first question from the audience is about Iraq: What would Carney do now? "I'd withdraw one American battalion for every Iraqi battalion ready to fight. President Bush says there are 50 Iraqi battalions ready." Of course, there really aren't 50 Iraqi battalions ready to operate independently; in fact, according to the U.S. military, there isn't even one. "Right, but the President claims there are 50," Carney said later. "We're not going to have an honest conversation about the war until the President is held accountable for the things he says."

Carney is no left-wing bomb thrower; he is a pragmatic moderate. Before the war began, he specialized in studying Saddam's ties to regional terrorist groups. "There were no links to 9/11," he told me. "But there were plenty of other contacts with terror groups. I always thought that was a better argument for the war than weapons of mass destruction." Carney's politics pretty accurately reflect the views of most Iraq combat veterans running as Democrats. They are not so much antiwar as anti-Bush, furious about the lack of preparation for the war, the insufficient troop levels, the lousy equipment. "I served in Kosovo and had an up-armored humvee," says Jon Soltz, the director of the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America political-action committee. "Then I served in Iraq and had a humvee that wasn't armored. I lost one soldier I sent on a convoy without armor. You don't forget

something like that."

Almost every one of the Iraq veterans running for Congress as a Democrat is in a tough, high-profile fight against a Republican incumbent: they'll be the poster boys (and women: Tammy Duckworth, who lost both legs in Iraq, is running in Illinois) for the Democrats' long-shot efforts to retake the House in 2006. They may also represent the beginning of the Dems' long climb back to credibility on national-security issues. Chris Carney has one of the toughest races. "The district is so Republican that no one really thinks he can win, even with Sherwood's problems," says G. Terry Madonna, who runs Franklin and Marshall College's Keystone Poll. But Iraq-war veterans running as Democrats is something new under the political sun--and Karl Rove's nightmare is that candidates like Carney will win some unexpected races this year.

The Last Word: John Edwards--'Real Moral Leadership'

Newsweek International

By Malcolm Beith

3/20

Republican opposition killed the proposed takeover of some American port facilities by a Dubai company, but congressional Democrats were the first to fan the flames of the controversy. Eager to capitalize on President George W. Bush's weakness in the polls, and with midterm elections looming later in the year, opposition-party members were clearly looking to regain some ground on national security. Former senator John Edwards, a vice presidential candidate in 2004, has similarly been laying the groundwork for a future run at the presidency by trying to bolster his foreign-policy credentials, most recently by co-chairing a Council on Foreign Relations task force examining U.S.-Russian relations. NEWSWEEK's Malcolm Beith spoke with Edwards about the Democrats, Dubai and Russia's bid to end the Iranian nuclear crisis. Excerpts:

Beith: Where do you stand on the ports deal?

Edwards: We shouldn't discriminate against any country, certainly not against an Arab country. The United Arab Emirates have done some really good things. [But] when it comes to the operation of our ports, I think American companies should be doing that. I don't think it should be British companies, or U.A.E. companies--I think we should be doing it. A lot of our ports are being operated right now by companies from other countries. I would not cancel those contracts or attempt to stop them, but as they expire... We should be doing this ourselves just because there's so much at stake. I also think simultaneously we need to be doing much better in terms of providing security in our ports. We're only inspecting about 5 percent of containers. We've got to have a goal of screening 100 percent of those containers.

Beith: With the congressional elections coming up later this year, how do you rate the Democrats' chances?

Edwards: I think we're going to do well in 2006. It's critical for us to hold Bush and the congressional Republican leadership accountable for all their failures. I think there are so many examples of incompetence in this administration, it's amazing: the management of the war in Iraq, the response to the hurricane, efforts to implement the Medicare prescription-drug bill... the list goes on and on and on.

But talking about what they're doing wrong is not enough. We also have to lay out our positive vision for the country so that it's clear to the American people what we would do. That's across a whole range of issues, [such as] poverty in America [and] absence of health-care coverage, and show that we're going to lead on the big moral issues that face the world. Not just the war in Iraq, but things like global poverty, genocide in Darfur, human-rights abuses... We have to show not only that we're strong, but real moral leadership.

Beith: What should the United States do to improve relations with Russia?

Edwards: [With Russia] we need to work with our allies in Europe--because when we speak with one voice, Russia responds much more positively. When it's just America, we don't get that kind of response. The second thing is we need to broaden the areas where we can cooperate. For example, we

could enter into a civilian nuclear agreement with Russia in much the same way that we have with India. Nonproliferation is a place where we can expand and strengthen our relationship.

Beith: Have the Russians been helpful on Iran?

Edwards: If I were going to choose a single test for our relationship with Russia, Iran is the test. We're united with the Europeans on this, so it really matters what Russia does in the Security Council. If ultimately the Iranians reject what we're demanding--us and the Russians--then we also should be saying to the Russians: "You should stop this Bushehr project because you can't continue to help them develop a nuclear facility while they're obviously in the process of trying to build a nuclear weapon."

How do you see the situation in Iraq right now? What would you be doing differently if you were in charge? There's a fundamental judgment about whether the footprint that we have in Iraq now is more harmful than helpful. I believe it's too large and, as a result, is more harmful. What I would do is quickly reduce the size of that footprint--reduce it by at least 40,000 troops, because we have to send a clear signal to Iraq and that part of the world that we're not going to stay there forever, we're going to allow Iraqis to govern themselves, we're going to allow them to provide their own security, and that we're not there for oil.

Second--we should already have been doing this for many months now--we have to intensify our training efforts, because these two things work together. Third, as we reduce our footprint, [we need to make] much more effort to engage in diplomacy in that part of the world, to try and get others to help us [and] help the Iraqis. The third one is by far the hardest. I'm very realistic about that. But we at least need to make the effort.

Beith: Have you decided whether you'll run for president in 2008?

Edwards: No, I have not decided anything.

How It's Looking

National Review

No author given

3/21

EDITOR'S NOTE: In a energetic lunchtime address and Q&A Monday in Cleveland, President Bush spoke about progress in Iraq and a "strategy for victory" there.

To mark the three-year anniversary this week of the Coalition going into Iraq, National Review Online gathered a group of experts for their read of how things are going. We asked, broadly: "What do you consider the most important points to keep in mind when considering Iraq three years after the Coalition invasion?" Here's what they had to say.

Peter Brookes: There are ten things to remember about Iraq three years after the invasion:

- 1) In spite of the violence, Iraqis are constructing one of the few democracies in the Middle East.
- 2) Withdrawing prematurely would leave a vacuum for al Qaeda, Iran, or Syria to fill, destabilizing the entire region.
- 3) Civil war will be a self-fulfilling prophecy if we buy into the idea, and give up.
- 4) We're fighting pure evil in Iraq. How many Iraqi women and children have al Qaeda/the insurgents slaughtered?
- 5) The quickest way to end a war is to lose it; losing would dishonor all those who served--or are serving--in Iraq.
- 6) Premature withdrawal will be seen as a historic victory for terrorism, encouraging even more bloodshed across the globe.

7) Our allies/friends around the world--as well as our enemies--are watching the strength/durability of our commitment in Iraq.

8) Iraq isn't Vietnam--or any other war. It's unique.

9) No terrorist attacks here since 9/11. Coincidence? I don't think so.

10) Finally, what may have started as a war of choice is now a war of necessity--for the reasons listed above.

--Peter Brookes is senior fellow for national-security affairs and director of the Asian Studies Center at the Heritage Foundation. He is author of *A Devil's Triangle: Terrorism, WMD and Rogue States*.

Jonathan Foreman: Confounding the expectations of cynics and terrorists, the majority Shia community has, at least until the Samarra mosque desecration, shown astonishing restraint and faith in a democratic future, despite months of murderous attacks by Sunni clansmen, Baathist diehards, and their al Qaeda Sunni allies. Likewise, Iraq's Kurdish leaders have put the future of a free Iraq before their own sectional interests.

* Millions more Americans now understand the untrustworthiness and dishonesty of the mainstream media--especially the half a million troops who have served in Iraq and who have seen their work go unreported or be misrepresented. (You can be sure that you are getting less than half the picture unless you read milblogs and Iraqi blogs and talk to troops who have come back. When was the last time you read about what the Australians or Poles are doing in Iraq? Have you ever heard a network anchor put our casualties in the contexts of other wars, or even auto accident rates in the U.S.?)

* Nevertheless the failure of the Administration to get pictures of the work Coalition forces do--from building sewage systems to training Iraqi forces--onto American national and local TV is a strategic defeat, on a par with the occupation government's failure to maintain order after Saddam's overthrow. The fact that millions of Americans wrongly believe that the 100,000 plus GIs in Iraq have achieved nothing there and are under constant attack by a hostile population could force the U.S. government into a premature withdrawal.

* It's hard to know what's really going on in Iraq--partly because of the localized nature of the war, partly because the threat of kidnap restricts the movement of white reporters, but mostly because the press corps reports only attacks and death tolls. However, my own visits have cured me of doubts about whether Iraqi freedom is worth the sacrifices of our troops. And when you talk to the some of the thousands of Iraqis who are risking their lives for a new Iraq (just ask them what they think of the "troops out" movement), it's clear that this is as noble a cause as any in our history.

* American successes in combat and in the battle for hearts and minds continue to be undermined by a Pentagon that still doesn't understand the importance of perception and prestige in the Middle East and the Global War on Terror. If we seem to be fearful because of domestic politics, or because our military doctrines emphasize "force protection" over victory, then our enemies will grow stronger, bolder, and more popular. That is why after three years, the stakes in Iraq are higher than ever. Though it is impossible for the insurgents to restore Saddam's Sunni tyranny in Iraq, we could still suffer a self-inflicted defeat that would herald the beginning of the end of America's global hegemony.

It's bad enough that the 30 allied countries who sent troops to Iraq (so much for "going it alone") found themselves out of pocket, unrecognized by the American public, deprived of a fair share of reconstruction contracts, and in the case of Denmark, actively betrayed by us during the cartoon affair. If we abandon Iraq to civil war and large-scale intervention by neighboring states, the Vietnam/Beirut theory, beloved of Osama and Milosevic (Americans are cowards who cut and run after a relative handful of deaths), will be seen to be true. It will be our last betrayal of friends and allies for a long time, because no-one will trust us again.

--Jonathan Foreman, who has reported from Iraq, is author of *The Pocket Book of Patriotism*.

M. Zuhdi Jasser: After three years, our losses and frustrations serve as proof of how sorely we were needed in Iraq. Iraq has become an epicenter of Islamist terror. But al Qaeda's fear of a free Iraq is the greatest sign that our mission is on target. Militant Islamists are now on the run in Iraq.

The conflict between political and pluralistic Islam is a central ideological war from which we should never run. If we change the political and economic environment in the Middle East, we will change the associated religious pathology. However, history teaches that after generations of oppression, a national transformation from a corrupt system into one of free markets and virtues does not happen overnight.

Under coercion people were nothing but slaves to their ruling thugs and theocrats. End the coercion, and begin the long, semi-chaotic process of liberating generations of a shackled Muslim mind.

Our resolve should remain indefinite. Iraq's liberators will be remembered not only for doing what Iraqis could never have done alone, but also for beginning to wrest the faith of Islam away from the theocrats. Iraq is only the first step of a long journey for Muslims and Arabs as they renew their love of liberty, pluralism, and personal integrity--free of coercion.

--M. Zuhdi Jasser is the chairman of the American Islamic Forum for Democracy based in Phoenix, Ariz.

Michael Ledeen: The president's speech Monday was fine as far as it goes, and the Tal Afar story is a great one (the public should have heard about it long since--ahem). Unfortunately, the speech doesn't go far enough, because yet again it was not about the war on terror, but about the defensive battle we are fighting in Iraq. The actual war involves Syria, Iran, and Saudi Arabia, at a minimum, with Pakistan floating in the punch bowl.

The more interesting document is the text of the questions and answers. President Bush has Iran on his mind, as you can tell from the fact that he raised it gratuitously while responding to an Iraq question, then kind of apologized for raising it, then went back to it again. He said that we're looking for a diplomatic solution, which is the party line. Later on, someone asked him about the difference between the Iraq threat and the Iran threat, and he sounded like an assistant secretary of State instead of a president. He said that we had all those U.N. resolutions before we attacked Saddam, and we're just starting down that road with Iran.

No talk of democratic revolution. No mention that Iran is the leading sponsor of terrorism. No encouragement for the Iranian people. Instead, a cheerful reference to talks between our ambassador to Iraq and the Iranians, as if diplomacy could end a war that Iran has been waging against us for 27 years.

Pfui.

--Michael Ledeen, an NRO contributing editor, is most recently the author of *The War Against the Terror Masters*. He is resident scholar in the Freedom Chair at the American Enterprise Institute

Mackubin Thomas Owens: As we look at the situation in Iraq three years after the U.S. invasion, it might be useful to consider what things might look like if we hadn't invaded. It is not altogether certain that things would be better than they are today. Indeed, they would probably be far worse.

First and foremost, Saddam would still be in power, and we should not underestimate his ability to have caused a great deal of mischief. Human-rights violations would continue. He would be lionized by other despots for his ability to thumb his nose at the international system. By now, the real "coalition of the bribed," the members of the U.N. Security Council that Saddam was paying off, would in all likelihood have permitted the sanctions regime that boxed Saddam in to wither away. Having rattled our swords but not followed through, U.S. credibility would be at its nadir.

Free of sanctions, Saddam would no doubt now be in the process of reconstituting his chemical and nuclear-weapons programs. The contacts between the Iraqi intelligence service and groups like al Qaeda, identified by the Senate Intelligence Committee and others, would now no doubt be more formalized.

Having seen us blink in the case of Iraq, countries such as Pakistan would be less likely to help us in our attempt to destroy al Qaeda. There's no guarantee that things would be better in Afghanistan either. The synergy arising from our efforts in both places would be lost.

Of course, critics of the war, especially Democrats, go out of their way to praise the ouster of Saddam but accuse the Bush administration of "dangerous incompetence" in the words of the most recent

Democratic talking points. I'm in the process of reviewing Cobra II by Michael Gordon and Mick Trainor for National Review, which makes it abundantly clear that there is plenty of blame to go around when it comes to the execution of the war. But as I compare some of the blunders in Iraq with far more egregious lapses in earlier wars, I wonder if we could ever have won World War II with today's press. I rather doubt it.

--Mackubin Thomas Owens is an associate dean of academics and a professor of national-security affairs at the Naval War College in Newport, R.I. He is writing a history of U.S. civil-military relations.

Bill Roggio: Since the fall of Saddam's regime, there have been both triumphs and setbacks for those attempting to establish a free society in Iraq. The setbacks have been tactical and not strategic in nature. For instance, after the Coalition recognized the mistakes in structuring the Iraqi army, the force was quickly restructured to fight the insurgency. There are now almost 50 Iraqi battalions in the lead fighting the insurgency, with another 80 battalions in supporting roles. The Iraqi security forces have yet to meet their full potential.

The political process, while painfully slow, has produced results. The Iraqi people braved the threats and acts of violence three separate times during 2005, and voted in numbers that should shame the citizens of established Western democracies.

Iraq is a central front in the War on Terror, as Zawahiri himself has stated. Al Qaeda has chosen to engage the U.S. in Iraq, and by doing so has alienated a large percentage of their purported supporters--the Sunnis--due to the indiscriminate use of violence. This is a stunning ideological victory which has essentially been ignored.

Finally, we must not forget the heroism and professionalism of our military and civilians serving in Iraq. They have proven to be committed warriors with the ability to adapt to the rigorous demands of fighting a counterinsurgency, and the knowledge gained on the battlefield will shape the way we approach future conflicts.

--Bill Roggio is an independent civilian military blogger. He served in the Army from 1991 to 1995, and now writes for his blog The Fourth Rail. He blogged from Iraq at threatswatch.org.

Michael Rubin: Success is evident: Iraqis can choose from dozens of television and radio channels, and scores of newspapers. Elections, political debate, and compromise are the norm. When chaos reigns, refugees flee. Why then have more than a million Iraqis returned to their country since liberation? Insurgency and terrorism are tragic. They were once to be found in Peru and Turkey as well. There, we did not undermine democracy with calls to strike deals with terrorists. Too many critics of President Bush treat Iraq as an excuse to grind political axes which have little or anything to do with Iraq. This is unfair to Iraqis.

Three years on, it is clear that success is not limited to Iraq. In 2005, Syria witnessed its two freest elections in a half century. How ironic, then, that only expatriate Iraqis could participate. While Arab regimes once sought to channel public anger to the Arab-Israeli conflict, Arab intellectuals and activists now debate dissent, reform, and democracy: Does top-down democratization have merits? The bottom-up approach? How to differentiate between NGOs and GONGOs (government-operated NGOs)? How best to support independent labor unions?

While bloggers may try to offer informed comment without ever stepping foot in Iraq, and journalists may focus on the daily blood, the greatest legacy of Iraq's liberation may be the new Middle Eastern discourse. Bush deserves credit for providing a catalyst. But it is the Iraqi people, Lebanese journalists, Egyptian dissidents, Tunisian bloggers, and many other courageous citizens who are alone responsible for creating a new, more democratic order.

--Michael Rubin, resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, is editor of The Middle East Quarterly. He has spent 20 months in Iraq, all but three of them outside the U.S. security zone.

Joseph Morrison Skelly: Three years after the launch of Operation Iraqi Freedom, three essential achievements merit our attention. First, the United States has scored significant strategic gains in the Global War on Terror. The Hussein regime, a fundamental threat to American interests and Middle Eastern stability, has been deposed. President Bush's "forward strategy of freedom" has been vindicated. Our geostrategic options are greater, while those of our adversaries are foreclosed. The

security of the United States and its allies, always the war's first priority, has been enhanced.

Second, at the operational level, Coalition and Iraqi forces are now implementing an effective approach to the terrorist insurgency, defined as "clear, hold, build." On Monday President Bush highlighted its successful application by the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment in Tal Afar. The Sunni mayor of Tal Afar concurs: "The mission they have accomplished ... stands among the finest military feats to date in Operation Iraqi Freedom."

Finally, the gradual spread of constitutional democracy, a hallmark of the Bush Administration's foreign policy, remains an essential component of the War on Terror. Its implementation, we know, must incorporate non-negotiable elements such as the rule of law and minority rights, but its inexorable success in Iraq will not only drain support for terrorists there, but will also serve as a vital component of the war of ideas in the greater Middle East.

--Joseph Morrison Skelly, a college professor in New York City, is a veteran of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

A 'Third Term' for Bush

Daily Standard
By Fred Barnes
3/21

It's time for President Bush to think about a third term. No, he doesn't need to overturn the Constitution. He can start the equivalent of his third term now, by filling his presidential staff and cabinet with new faces--or old faces in new positions--and by concentrating on new or forgotten initiatives. The goal: rejuvenation of his presidency by shocking the media and political community with a sweeping overhaul of his administration. The impact would be enormous because it's exactly what his foes have been demanding and exactly what he is not expected to do. And it would give him a chance to escape the political doldrums that may otherwise doom his presidency through its final 34 months.

Only a few months ago, it appeared the Bush administration didn't need emergency resuscitation. True, Bush had suffered a year of serious troubles--failure of Social Security reform, Katrina, Harriet Miers, Iraq--following his second inauguration. Yet he emerged bruised but politically alive. He'd even won the confirmation of two conservative Supreme Court justices.

Then he was belted with a new round of reversals. His State of the Union address was uninspiring, the Dubai ports deal had to be nixed, and his proposed spending cuts were going nowhere. This time the fallout was worse for Bush. Republican unity, so important to his past success, dissolved as congressional Republicans began criticizing the White House. And Iraq was again a political problem. Even several top Bush aides now suspect an infusion of fresh talent could liven up the administration.

A broad transformation, playing on the media's overreaction whenever surprised, would do more. Reporters would be forced to write stories about new officials, cover confirmation hearings, show up at press conferences they might have ignored, assess new policies, and--this is most important--take a fresh look at the president. It would be like the beginning of a new presidential term. Sure, the press and politicians would be cynical about Bush's bold moves, especially since he wouldn't be uprooting any policy or hiring Bush critics. In truth, there would be a large element of smoke and mirrors in his actions. The trade-off is that Bush might revitalize his presidency.

A sweeping overhaul on a smaller scale has worked before. In one swoop in 1975, President Ford replaced Defense Secretary James Schlesinger with Donald Rumsfeld, made Dick Cheney chief of staff, appointed George H.W. Bush as CIA director in place of William Colby, and stripped Secretary of State Henry Kissinger of his second post as national security adviser, installing Brent Scowcroft. These surprising and dramatic steps strengthened a weak Ford presidency. President Carter tried something similar in 1979 when his presidency was at a low point. But the overhaul was handled clumsily. Carter appeared to act arbitrarily and his presidency never recovered.

Bush's first task must be to jettison his admirable but unrealistic sense of loyalty. Unlike other presidents, he reciprocates the loyalty of his aides. But for the good of his presidency, he must let some of them go, regardless of whether they deserve firing.

The president's most spectacular move would be to anoint a presidential successor. This would require Vice President Cheney to resign. His replacement? Condoleezza Rice, whom Bush regards highly. Her replacement? Democratic Sen. Joe Lieberman of Connecticut, whose Bush-like views on Iraq and the war on terror have made him a pariah in the Democratic caucus.

Cheney would probably be happy to step down and return to Wyoming. But it would make more sense for him to move to the Pentagon to replace Donald Rumsfeld as Defense secretary, a job Cheney held during the elder Bush's administration. The Senate confirmation hearing for Cheney alone would produce political fireworks and attract incredible attention. At Treasury, Bush has a perfect replacement for John Snow, someone he already knows. That's Glenn Hubbard, former chairman of Bush's council of economic advisers and currently dean of Columbia's business school. He is in sync with Bush ideologically and has the added value of being respected on Wall Street.

With these changes, Bush would have brought in new Cabinet chiefs at three of the big four agencies. Only Justice would be untouched, but it might be too much for the president to force his friend Alberto Gonzales out as attorney general.

At the White House, highly visible changes would be required, starting with the most visible post of all besides the presidency--press secretary. Dan Senor, a Republican and former spokesman for Paul Bremer in Iraq, would be a perfect successor to Scott McClellan. He would be an articulate and forceful defender of Bush on Iraq. And if not Senor, then presidential counselor Dan Bartlett, who always does well in TV interviews.

As a new chief of staff, Bush's pal from his Harvard Business School days, Al Hubbard, could replace Andy Card. Hubbard is miscast as top White House economic adviser. To replace him, Kevin Hassett of the American Enterprise Institute would fit. He has close ties to the Bush White House. There's also a natural choice for national security adviser to replace Stephen Hadley. It's Zalmay Khalilzad, the tough-minded ambassador to Iraq. Once a permanent government is installed there, he could be summoned home.

The trickiest issue is how to handle Karl Rove, the deputy White House chief of staff and political adviser. He is the closest thing to indispensable--on policy as well as politics--at the White House. But any overhaul that didn't involve him would run the risk of not being taken seriously. The solution is to send Rove to the Republican National Committee as chairman and bring the current chairman, Ken Mehlman, back to the president's staff as communications chief. The president lauded Rove as "the architect" of his reelection in 2004. Now he could be the architect of a Republican comeback in 2006. Mehlman would sharpen the president's communication operation. He and Rove would work together, as they do now.

New faces and personnel shifts are necessary but not sufficient to produce the aura of a new presidential term. Major policy initiatives are required, too. And there are plenty to choose from. For one, Bush could mount a fresh crusade for confirmation of federal appeals court judges: 11 of them are waiting in the wings. And there's always taxes, a hardy GOP perennial. Bush's tax reform commission was a bust, but that shouldn't stop him from proposing significant tax reforms and cuts. He doesn't have to win congressional approval. To revive his presidency, at this point he only need focus on them.

In foreign policy, there's a broad new alliance waiting to be packaged, now that NATO has lost its rationale. Suggested by Tom Donnelly of the American Enterprise Institute, it would bring together four antiterrorist, free-market democracies, all concerned about the growing power of China. They are the U.K., India, Japan and the U.S.

The new but still conservative look of the Bush administration and its new policy emphasis would thrill the base and perhaps independents as well. Should that lead to an unanticipated Republican victory in the midterm election in November, Bush would be empowered to return to old initiatives such as Social Security reform and his faith-based initiative.

Of course, there are risks and problems in trying to revitalize a flagging administration. The most worrisome risk is that Bush would look weak and desperate. Carter did in 1979 and became a laughingstock. That could happen to Bush. Also, it may be difficult to persuade outsiders to join what looks to them as a hopelessly lame-duck administration.

The president could lose a lot more than face. But the potential upside of a stunning facelift of his administration is great. It could make his presidency productive and enjoyable again rather than stymied and disheartened. Achieving the aura and feel of a new presidential term is not farfetched. Bush fooled everyone by becoming the president of big ideas and bold plans. He could fool them again.

-- Fred Barnes is executive editor of The Weekly Standard and author of Rebel in Chief, published last month by Crown Forum. This essay originally appeared in the March 20, 2006 Wall Street Journal.

IRAN

Hitting Iran

National Review

By William F. Buckley Jr.

3/17

A sane and studious observer of the international scene addressed the sophisticated dinner guests and concluded his optimistic analysis of our Iraqi venture with an arresting afterthought. "What we will not be seeing, when President Bush leaves office, is an Iran with a nuclear bomb."

Almost all discussion of pressing strategic concerns touches down on Iran. The drumrolling on Nuclear Iran makes it retrospectively incredible that when Pakistan joined the nuclear club, we simply heard about it, roughly speaking the day after they exploded one. By contrast, Iran is almost every week in the news on the matter of its determination to have a bomb. Most recently there was a setback, when Moscow declined to provide some of the help that Iran had asked for. It was this development, in the opinion of some analysts, that caused Teheran to agree to send a mission to Baghdad to confer with our Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad.

This hardly means that Iran is ready to negotiate an end to its nuclear development. Stephen Hadley, national security adviser to the president, caught the spirit of U.S. reaction to this development. "We're talking to Iran all the time. We make statements, they make statements."

But repeated statements by the president on the matter of U.S. concern over a nuclear-armed Iran bring up the question: What do we intend to do about it if Iran, departing from its bluster, adopts the Pakistani mode and proceeds noiselessly to nuclear armament?

The conversation turns to military intervention. A year ago, The New Yorker ran an extensive essay on the subject by Seymour Hersh, the salient finding of which was that to bring off an interdictionary operation is very nearly impossible. Item #1: The Israeli air force does not have airplanes with a range sufficient to complete a round-trip to Iranian targets. Israeli culture does not sanction suicide missions, and it is inconceivable that planes would fly from Israel on suicide missions.

Item #2, nuclear sites in Iran are spread about, so that what the Israelis did in the 1981 bombing of Osirak, aborting the whole Iraqi nuclear operation, cannot be reproduced in Iran. An air strike superior to anything the Israelis could mount would be required.

And Item #3, to get on with such an operation, requiring aircraft carriers and strategically useful bases on the perimeter of the target area, could not conceivably be done stealthily. The whole world would be ongoing witness to the impending operation, and pacifist anti-American capitulationist forces would rise to put almost impassable diplomatic obstacles in the way.

Well then, can we get on with sanctions? These would seem to be scheduled, with the reiterated threat to call to the attention of the Security Council the illegality of Iran's program, as a signer of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. But in the first place, Moscow, in its anfractuous way, would probably veto sanctions. But what if it didn't? A determined international anti-Iran effort would hurt Iranians and Iranian interests, but how decisively? We aren't going to refuse to consume Iranian oil. Economic boycotts mostly do not work, and if and when they do (e.g., against Rhodesia) they require great stretches of time to generate real pain, and time is what we do not have.

The point insufficiently pressed is this: Why does the United States need to shoulder the critical burden

here? If Iran gets the bomb, probably a new set of strategic relationships would arise. Saudi Arabia and Egypt would clamor for the bomb, perhaps also Turkey. Regional internecine pressures would mount hugely. What it comes down to is that the United States would be critically affected, but other nations would be more directly affected, and the question repeats itself: Why do they not take on the responsibility of intervening in Iran?

Why should France not interrupt its August holiday to participate in a military mission? The interests of Germany and India are clearly affected. Where is U.S. diplomacy going with all of this? It's one thing that the United States is the ultimate deterrent power, but we act as though there were no others, and this is both emasculating and psychologically subversive.

Ideally, the initiative would be taken elsewhere, a forceful European or Middle Eastern leader mobilizing continental and Asian concern.

But failing that, the initiative would necessarily fall on us, and the question then becomes: Is it something Mr. Bush is going to handle before the end of his term in office?

Truth or Dare in Tehran

U.S. News & World Report

By Thomas Omestad

3/20

This is the week Bush administration diplomats had been hoping for--for months. After seemingly endless maneuvering, the U.N. Security Council will, for the first time, take up the issue of Iran's alleged drive for nuclear weapons. It is a turn of events that the Iranian regime had feverishly sought to avoid. But its refusal to accept an earlier Russian compromise proposal to conduct the enrichment of uranium in Russia, rather than in Iran, ensured that the dispute would escalate.

Washington and its European allies in London, Berlin, and Paris believe that Iran's two decades of concealment of its nuclear activities--and its unwillingness to cooperate fully with the International Atomic Energy Agency--attest to an ambition for weapons, not just civilian nuclear power, as Tehran claims. Still, the Europeans and others want to ratchet up the pressure slowly, in hopes of gaining traction for a diplomatic resolution of the issue. Last week, the IAEA's board allowed the issue to move to the Security Council, which could levy sanctions. The council is unlikely to take that step anytime soon, though. As a first step, diplomats expect that the council's president, Ambassador Cesar Mayoral of Argentina, this week will demand that Iran stop enrichment-related activities, particularly at its centrifuge plant at Natanz. Then, the council will wait to see how Iran reacts.

"Harm and pain." Finding a compromise under the spotlight of Security Council attention will be difficult. Washington's bottom line is that Iran has ceded any right to produce nuclear fuel at home by dint of its cheating--and that not even small-scale, experimental enrichment of uranium can be permitted, since that could provide knowledge useful for making nuclear weapons. After Iran dragged out the talks with London, Berlin, and Paris over the issue, all three moved closer to Washington's tough stand. "We were pretty clear that a little enrichment activity is almost as bad as a lot of enrichment activity," says a senior State Department official. Moscow and Beijing, however, seem amenable to cutting Tehran a bit more slack and have made it clear that they oppose sanctions. Still, Iran vows to persist in enriching uranium, and last week it warned of "harm and pain" for the United States if sanctions are imposed. That could be a veiled reference to Iran's cutting oil exports to punish the West with higher prices, though some officials in Tehran deny it, or to stirring up trouble for U.S. forces in Iraq.

The Bush administration also had warnings for Iran. Vice President Cheney predicted "meaningful consequences" if Tehran doesn't back down. The U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, John Bolton, spoke of "painful consequences" and insisted that "all tools" remain "at our disposal." With Iran's defiance deepening, Washington may soon be forced to reveal which tools it has in mind.

A Concert that Cannot be Held in Tehran

National Review

By Travis Kavulla

It was an unusual coming together.

Gathered under a large banner that read "Iran Freedom Concert" were the leaders of the Harvard Republicans and Democrats, the campus gay-rights advocacy group (BGLTSA), and the conservative magazine (The Salient), among many others.

The two-hour event, held on Saturday, drew about 150 people and, in between musical sets, featured the Iranian student leader Akbar Atri, fresh from a March 3 appearance before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, as well as John Haddock, a junior and president of Harvard's undergraduate council.

Appearances by two chanteuses were a poignant case-in-point--in Iran, female vocalists are permitted to sing only back-up and never before male crowds. One Iranian human-rights group, the Abdorrahman Boroumand Foundation, wrote in with the reminder, "You are attending a concert that can not be held in Tehran."

Relatively speaking, this is but a trifling incidence of rights denied. Over the past week, the campus was festooned with posters showing a forwardness of a type rarely seen in Harvard Yard. "In Iran," the posters read in boldface type, "You can be sentenced to death because of your religious beliefs. Criticizing the Supreme Leader on your blog is a crime. You cannot sell a copy of the Christian Bible. Women are stoned to death for adultery. Gay teenagers are hanged."

The announcements were sobering, especially when juxtaposed with the typical fare of Harvard activism. Last week, for instance, the cause du jour was co-ed housing, about which the student government grandiloquently invoked undergraduates' "right to self-determination in deciding with whom they will live in university housing."

Those activists who gaze outside the gates look no farther than the usual target, the Bush administration. This March, by my count, has now had just over a dozen teach-ins, roundtables, and similarly circuitous groupthink sessions to decry the usual battery of things: the Patriot Act, the Solomon Amendment, and, of course, the War on Terror.

But the brusque reality needing to be exposed is that Iran's human-rights situation is poor and getting poorer. When a large picture appeared, huge on the projection screen of the Iran Freedom Concert, showing two Iranian teenagers with nooses around their necks, about to be hanged for the crime of homosexuality, the student sitting next to me gasped. Suddenly, the campus chatter of "rights" is put in sharp perspective.

Well, it is for most people, at least.

Ignoring the substance of the concert, a handful of loud detractors fretted that the Iran Freedom Concert was a diabolical neocon ploy.

Kyle Krahel, a sophomore, broke with his group's leadership and wrote on the Harvard Democrats' blog an entry entitled "Beware of the Iran Freedom Concert." He worried that some leaders of the group that helped bring the student activist Atri to campus, the American Islamic Congress, had committed the unforgivable sin of supporting the Iraq war. Employ the simple Crimson calculus (Bush = Bad) and you get Krahel's frenzy over "how much collusion by the American Islamic Congress and the Bush Administration there is in this Concert. This Administration has a history of manipulation and covert propaganda and I don't want to be a part of it."

At the event itself, there was a colorful, albeit small, eruption of protesters--six in all, only one of whom would give his name. The group held aloft "No U.S. War on Iran" signs, and occasionally shouted during Atri's speech. (They were, nonetheless, invited to stay and talk to organizers and Atri afterward--they declined.)

The protester who agreed to provide his name was Alireza Doostdar, a Ph.D. candidate in anthropology at Harvard, who asserted that "just by holding an event like this, [organizers] are playing into the hands of the neoconservative agenda for war against Iran."

So what can be done for human rights in Iran? "There's already been a lot of progress," noted Doostdar, a leader of the campus group Alliance for Justice in the Middle East. "America has a human rights problem of its own, where no progress is being made."

And Doostdar was the level-headed one. Among the cadre of protesters was a 40-something Persian woman who, in so many words, said Atri "is considered a traitor to the Islamic Republic of Iran."

Surely he is, having been convicted in absentia for conspiring to overthrow the government for collecting signatures on a petition that demanded a referendum on the Islamic Republic's legitimacy.

But the concert, of course, was far from being a neoconservative ploy. Speakers frequently--too frequently--unleashed caveats: "We're not neocolonialists," said one saxophonist before he played; "We have no agenda, unless that agenda is students' rights" said the emcee; . Haddock, the student-body president, conjured the memory of the Beastie Boys' Adam Yauch and his "Free Tibet" concerts. Atri himself stated rather clearly, "We shouldn't go to war with Iran."

But the bottom line got through loud and clear: "In Iran, believing something could equal your death. And here," Atri looked to the protesters in the back, "you can criticize anything without fear."

The Iran Freedom Concert was a bold step towards honesty about the rhetoric of universal human rights, besting the utter silence on the issue previously offered by an academy too often reticent to make pesky value judgments. That an event could enjoy the sponsorship of such a diverse coalition of Left, Right, and nonpartisan student groups--even if it made for a milquetoast result--might just mean things are looking up around here after all.

--Travis Kavulla is a senior at Harvard and editor of The Harvard Salient.

IRAQ

More Pain, No Gain

Economist

No author given

3/18

For much of the past two years Iraq has seemed poised to dissolve into hostile ethnic and sectarian enclaves. But this week—on the third anniversary, as it happens, of the American-led invasion—the body politic seemed even more fragile than usual. On March 12th a series of bombs and mortar barrages ripped across the Shia slum of Sadr City, killing more than 50 people—a strike that seemed designed to stoke the anger that was still simmering after the demolition of the Shia Askariya shrine three weeks ago, and hasten the descent into civil war.

The Sadr City suburb is the Baghdad base of the Mahdi Army, loyal to Muqtada al-Sadr, a radical Shia cleric. His men were probably responsible for many of the reprisal attacks launched against Sunni mosques after the bombing of the Askariya shrine in Samarra—where American and Iraqi forces launched a fierce attack on insurgents on March 16th. Yet residents of Sadr City had considered themselves to be living in quite a safe zone. In part, this was because of the ubiquitous black-clad militiamen who stop any strange car that ventures into the area. It was also because of Mr Sadr himself. Whatever his followers' inclinations, he has been careful to express solidarity with Sunnis against the American and British occupiers.

That sense of safety has been shattered since rumours spread through the slum that residents of surrounding middle-class Sunni neighbourhoods had been gunning down Sadr City residents on their way to work. Some Sadrists say that it is now high time to end the menace posed by Sunni extremists once and for all. If the religious leadership would give the word, they say, Baghdad could be a Shia city "in minutes".

Mr Sadr has tried to calm down his followers as he always does, by diverting blame towards the Americans. But in a televised address he did utter one ominous reference to the Americans preventing his militias from striking at the "takfiris"—that is, at the Sunni ultra-puritans whom Shias blame for most attacks. And since some of Mr Sadr's followers do not make much distinction between takfiris and

mainstream Sunnis, this set the scene for a new round of revenge killings.

Grisly evidence of these killings has been surfacing all week. On March 15th, police said that during the preceding 24 hours they had discovered the bodies of 87 people killed execution-style, although some of them might have been murdered before the latest blasts. The victims were discovered in both Shia and Sunni districts of Baghdad. Some had been tortured. The discovery of these bodies, so soon after the blows against the protected Shia neighbourhood and the Askariya shrine, can be expected to feed the cycle of reprisals and counter-reprisals in the days ahead.

Meanwhile, an increasingly personalised quarrel between the Shia-led United Iraqi Alliance on the one hand and the Kurdish, Sunni Arab and secular parties on the other threatens to paralyse politics altogether. Jalal Talabani, the Kurdish leader, has led a campaign to force the Alliance to rescind its decision to re-nominate Ibrahim al-Jaafari as prime minister. Mr Talabani says that during his year in power Mr Jaafari consistently failed to implement Kurdish-Shia agreements on resettling refugees and otherwise undoing Saddam-era ethnic cleansing in the disputed city of Kirkuk. The dispute has now grown into more than just a matter of policy differences. The Kurds say that they simply have no faith that Mr Jaafari will act on his commitments. The Sunnis have their own complaints, mostly related to the government's failure to protect them from abuses by the security forces.

The dispute over Mr Jaafari's leadership has poisoned Iraqi politics to the extent that, until a week ago, nearly three months after December's elections, the two sides could not even agree to convene the newly elected parliament by the constitutional deadline of March 15th. The constitution is ambiguous about how binding the transitional deadlines are: failure to abide by them does not necessarily mean a crisis. But ignoring the date completely would not have boded well for the prospects of forming a new government, let alone one that might entice the formerly excluded Sunni parties into government. Only after the personal intervention of Zalmay Khalilzad, America's energetic ambassador, did the quarrelling groups at last agree to meet on March 16th. Even so, all the outstanding issues remain. Mr Khalilzad has spoken of herding Iraqi leaders into a conference, possibly outside Iraq, to "work day and night" to reach a consensus on how to proceed.

Nonetheless, Iraq continues to generate the odd ray of hope. One such is a recent agreement intended to deal with the problem of death squads. Sunnis have long accused the Shia-controlled interior-ministry forces, both police and commandos, of abducting and killing Sunnis.

On March 12th the defence and interior ministries announced an agreement designed to address these concerns. Under this the army, which has a less brutal reputation, will accompany interior-ministry forces on all their raids. The interior ministry is also investigating an incident in which an American patrol reportedly caught a death squad red-handed on its way to kill a prisoner. Occasional accords such as this, in addition to the periodic bursts of rhetoric extolling the virtues of national reconciliation that follow outrages such as the Sadr City bombings, suggest that none of Iraq's main factions is ready to march over the edge just yet. Nor, however, do they show much readiness for compromise.

Hurry Up and Wait

Weekly Standard

By Max Boot

3/20

Camp Victory, Iraq

I will never whine about delays and hassles at civilian airports ever again. During a week spent touring U.S. military installations in Iraq, I encountered the Mother of All Delays. Repeatedly. That C-17 flight from Qatar to Baghdad that was supposed to leave at 8 a.m.? It won't be taking off until 8 p.m. That Chinook that was supposed to go from Forward Operating Base Warhorse, near Baqubah, to Landing Zone Washington, in Baghdad's Green Zone? It's going to a different destination. And your luggage? It's still in Kuwait.

Such experiences, multiplied repeatedly, reminded me of why GIs in World War II coined that handy acronym snafu. Not that I'm complaining. I realize that travel in a war zone is necessarily a precarious and uncertain business. Above all I'm thankful that I was able to complete my journey safely--a tribute to the professionalism of Army and Air Force crews who labor under constant threat of attack.

Moreover, it gradually dawned on me that all those delays were not such a bad thing. It may have made it harder for me to do traditional "reporting"--sticking a notebook in some commander's face and asking pesky questions. But there were some unexpected fringe benefits.

I write these words, for instance, while sitting on a patio at one of Saddam Hussein's palace complexes in Baghdad, now part of sprawling Camp Victory adjacent to Baghdad International Airport. The weather is perfect (about 70 degrees, with a light breeze), the water in the manmade lake is lapping gently against the patio, and the beige-stone Al Faw Palace (now the headquarters of Multi-National Corps-Iraq) looms majestically in the background. The stillness is interrupted only by the occasional thwup-thwup-thwup of a Blackhawk flight.

Who would expect such a moment of bliss in the middle of a war? Yet there were several such pleasant interludes during a week spent hopscotching around U.S. installations in central and northern Iraq. For all the hazards of duty in Iraq--and make no mistake, every Humvee or helicopter ride risks disaster--I discovered that troops (and their visitors) can enjoy considerable comforts while on base.

All but the smallest installations have their own Post Exchanges, the biggest of which rival a Wal-Mart in size and selection. Also common at the bigger bases are fast food restaurants (Subway, Burger King, Cinnabon), movie theaters, swimming pools, and vast chow halls where free, copious, and varied food is dished out by cheerful South Asian contract workers. Among the more surrealistic moments of my trip was sitting down at a base near Baqubah--a far-from-pacified city with a majority Sunni population--to enjoy a fresh-brewed iced latte at a Green Beans coffee shop.

The U.S. military's logistical feats make the Romans look like amateurs by comparison. The entire greater Middle East, from Qatar to Afghanistan, is studded with vast installations, few of which existed just four years ago. Here, relatively safe behind rows of barbed wire and giant concrete barricades, tens of thousands of Americans can enjoy a simulacrum of their lives back home, albeit without their families (although there is a small but growing minority of soldiers who are married to each other and can wangle an assignment at the same installation). Soldiers may lead Spartan lives by the standards of modern America, but they enjoy luxury unimaginable to their predecessors in World War II or Vietnam. Dorm-style quarters (called "chews," for Containerized Housing Units) are stocked with iPods, TVs, mini-refrigerators, and air-conditioning/heating units.

So vast are the logistical requirements of the armed forces that for every soldier or Marine performing harrowing combat patrols down bomb-infested streets, there are several support workers (many from private contractors such as KBR, formerly known as Kellogg Brown & Root) who rarely leave base. LSA (Logistics Support Area) Anaconda, the main U.S. supply hub in Iraq, which is located near the northern town of Balad, has a population of some 30,000, one-third of them civilians.

Yet no matter how luxurious the base, the specter of death is never far off, whether in a random mortar or rocket attack, or in all the facilities named after soldiers killed in action. (To take only one of countless examples, Forward Operating Base Gabe in Baqubah, home of the 1st battalion, 68th Armor Regiment--itself named for a slain soldier--has a physical fitness center named after Specialist Isaac M. Nieves, who died on April 8, 2004.) Even the tranquility of the patio at Camp Victory was broken in the early evening by a haunting memorial service for a sergeant slain a few days earlier.

The best part of all the delays I encountered was not experiencing the comforts of life "inside the wire." It was meeting the men and women who live there. A more selfless and dedicated--not to mention more friendly and polite--group is impossible to imagine, even if their manner of speaking can take some getting used to. It sometimes seems as if soldiers' vocabulary is limited to two words, one of which is "Hooah," an all-purpose affirmation that is roughly equivalent to "uh-huh." You can guess the other staple of soldier-speak.

Pretty much everyone currently in Iraq enlisted or reenlisted knowing that he or she would be sent to war. (The use of "she" isn't just political correctness--there are lots of women here, and they are not just performing traditional support functions, such as nurses or clerks. I saw female soldiers skillfully handling .50 caliber machine guns on patrol.) Not only do service personnel cheerfully face danger beyond the imagination of your average cubicle dweller, but they also work harder than an investment banker--and for a fraction of the salary.

"I've never worked as little as a 12-hour day yet," one sergeant told me. Eighteen-hour days seem to be the norm, and days off are unheard of. (Soldiers do get a couple of weeks of R&R in the rear or

back home in the middle of a one-year deployment.) In many units, one soldier will be sent to fetch lunch from the DFAC (dining facility) so that everyone else can continue working. Others skip lunch altogether or gobble a PowerBar on the run.

One colonel, a brigade commander, told me that the only break he gets comes when he gets his hair cut. I believe him--after all, we were conducting our interview at 10 p.m., and he was still in the office. "If you work 18 hours a day, seven days a week, and you don't drink alcohol, it's amazing how much you can get done," a senior general joked.

No alcohol? That's right: No booze is allowed at U.S. bases in Iraq; troops have to make do with nonalcoholic beer. This abstinence policy is prompted by the desire not to offend local sensibilities even though many Iraqis are happy to take a drink themselves. Given how common pre-combat drinking or drug-taking was in centuries past (think of the rum ration), the U.S. armed forces today may field the soberest soldiers ever sent into harm's way.

Soldiers have few ways to relieve the tension of facing death or maiming on a daily basis other than by working out (all bases have well-stocked gyms), calling or emailing home (free computer time and low-cost phone calls are available at Morale, Welfare, and Relief centers)--or by smoking. Lighting up may have gone out of style back home, but it still seems de rigueur in Iraq. Cigars and cigarettes are everywhere, along with chewing tobacco. One grizzled sergeant-major who was happily puffing away asked if I smoked. I told him I hadn't been in Iraq long enough to pick up the habit, but that if I faced the dangers that he did all the time, I'd be making like a chimney myself.

-- Max Boot, a contributing editor to The Weekly Standard, is a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations and a columnist for the Los Angeles Times.

Not Civil War, Not Yet, But...

U.S. News & World Report

By Kevin Whitelaw, Amer Saleh and Ben Gilbert

3/20

When Samir Ali's parents wanted the family to flee Iraq last year amid continuing violence, he refused, unwilling to leave his friends during his freshman year at the University of Baghdad. But now, in the wake of the sectarian violence triggered by the recent bombing of a key Shiite shrine, 18-year-old Ali has had enough. "What happened is that I begged my parents to take me outside Iraq, especially when I saw Shiites attack the Sunni mosques," he says. "Before, our enemy was the occupation and we had to fight it, but now we are fighting each other, and that is the point when I decided that I should leave Iraq and finish my study abroad." Now, he is just waiting for his paperwork from a Syrian university.

Ali's is not the only Sunni family planning to leave. Myssa Fadil, 31, who teaches at a Baghdad primary school, also fears a civil war. "I have been working as a teacher for 10 years, but now I have to leave it and go outside Iraq, at least for the sake of my two kids and husband," she says. "Each time my husband leaves for work, I pray to God to keep him safe from car bombs, but if civil war starts, I don't think my prayers will be enough." Fadil has rented her house for a year and plans to sell the jewelry her husband gave her on her wedding day to fund their move to Syria.

A deep gloom. Without reliable statistics, it is impossible to know how much of a trend these departures represent. But they reflect a sharply higher level of anxiety among many Iraqis--particularly Sunnis--over the future of their troubled nation. Despite repeated claims by U.S. officials that Iraq is not slipping into a civil war, a deep gloom has settled over Baghdad. In more than two weeks of violence, hundreds of Iraqis have been killed in a burst of attacks that broke down largely along the Sunni-Shiite divide. Even U.S. Central Command chief Gen. John Abizaid acknowledged on Capitol Hill that the security situation in Iraq is "changing in its nature from insurgency toward sectarian violence."

These days, attackers are increasingly turning their sights on Iraqis themselves, even more so than at U.S. soldiers. (Indeed, the number of U.S. troops killed in action has declined in recent weeks.) Insurgents also proved last week that they still have the capability to pull off spectacular attacks calculated to aggravate divisions and spread fear. A U.S. military patrol stumbled across an abandoned

bus in western Baghdad that contained the corpses of 18 men--bound, blindfolded, and strangled. U.S. officials said the victims were mostly Sunnis. In an even bolder strike, gunmen masquerading as Iraqi security forces stormed a Baghdad security firm and hauled away some 50 hostages.

Perhaps the most demoralizing attack for U.S. officials, however, was the assassination of Maj. Gen. Hatim al-Dulaimi, the commander of the 10,000-man 6th Division of the Iraqi Army. The Saddam Hussein-era general was one of the few high-level Sunnis in the new Iraqi Army and had been widely praised for creating integrated units that largely reflected Iraq's ethnic and sectarian makeup. "This one definitely hurt," says one State Department official. "It's a deliberate message intended to say there is no middle ground--an attempt to say there is no national identity that you can cling to and that it's time to pick a side."

Even worse, there was no sign of progress in the protracted talks to form a new government, some four months after the widely hailed election. Massoud Barzani, president of the Kurdish region, declared that the nation is in a political "crisis." Iraqi politicians are still wrangling over whether the current prime minister, Ibrahim Jafari, will be reappointed, and they have barely begun to tussle over other key cabinet posts. Even if the new parliament is finally convened on March 19, as announced last week, it could take Iraqi leaders quite a while to name a new government. In the meantime, the deadlock feeds the perception of chaos in Baghdad. "What kind of government do we have when it can't stop the killing, kidnapping, and car bombs?" asks Fadil. "I take my salary to teach and raise up children, but they take theirs to increase the killings, unemployment, and corruption in their time of duty."

Sunnis, of course, aren't the only ones who are scared. Increasingly, some Sunnis and Shiites living in mixed neighborhoods are choosing to abandon their homes, fleeing for the safety of more homogeneous neighborhoods. One Shiite doctor, who refused to be named out of fear for his safety, has lived for several years in an expensive house in a largely Sunni section of Baghdad. But amid worsening security, the aftermath of the Samarra mosque attack was the last straw. "We didn't sell our house. We just left it," he says. "We were afraid of attack after they threatened to kill all of the Shiites in this area." The doctor relocated to a Shiite neighborhood.

Dangerous spark. Not everyone is worried about civil war. "You have to understand that there is no history of animosity between Shiites and Sunnis," says Sahar Kharuffa, an architect in Baghdad. "You need that to trigger a full-scale confrontation." But even if the violence does not yet have popular backing, the Samarra bombing was the first attack to spark mass sectarian strife.

Many U.S. officials, and some Iraqi leaders, have said that the best hope for Iraq would be the formation of a national unity government. But relations between Sunni and Shiite leaders have deteriorated sharply in recent weeks. And splits are emerging among Shiites themselves. While some Shiite leaders talk about a unity government, they also have to reckon with a growing sense of entitlement from their own people, who are demanding that Shiites assert their power as the majority. Some Shiite leaders "want to help and share power with the Sunnis and Kurds, but they didn't think of us before," says Haider Jammal, a Shiite contractor in Baghdad. "The Sunnis and Kurds didn't stop the mass graves of our people before. So any Shiite leader should think of the pain of the people, and only then will his people have faith in him."

The deepening splits are a particular concern in the Iraqi security forces, where the ethnic makeup of some units can be quite homogeneous. The "Muthana" brigade of the Iraqi Army, for example, is made up mostly of Shiites from southern Iraq. On a recent patrol, the brigade's pickup trucks rattled through the Sunni neighborhood of Ghazaleeyah. Plastered on the steel turret of one pickup's .50-caliber machine gun mountings were two photos--one of a revered Shiite saint and another depicting the radical Shiite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr, whose militiamen were accused of carrying out revenge attacks after the Samarra shrine bombing.

The soldiers in the Muthana brigade insist they bear no ill will toward ordinary Sunnis; most are poor and enlisted largely for the \$300 monthly paycheck. "I joined the Army to fight insurgents and destroy the Baath Party," says Ali Slabya Hammat. "Two of my brothers were killed by the Baath Party and Saddam Hussein. I want revenge." The unit, however, regularly patrols a dense, urban neighborhood filled with Sunnis who benefited from Saddam's regime. So far, U.S. officials insist units like Muthana have been reliable. But if civil war does begin to unfold, says Jeffrey White, a former Iraq analyst for the Defense Intelligence Agency, "you could see the security forces we've created begin to act more clearly along sectarian lines."

Can He Make Peace Bloom?

Time

By Aparisim Ghosh

3/20

"Everyone wants me to solve their problems," Zalmay Khalilzad says as he adjusts his bulletproof vest and settles into the back seat of his armored SUV. The U.S. ambassador to Iraq has just emerged from a meeting at the sprawling riverside home of Abdel Aziz al-Hakim, who heads the coalition of Shi'ite parties that controls Iraq's incoming parliament. It didn't go well. For more than an hour, Khalilzad tried to persuade al-Hakim to help revive the Iraqi political process, stalled in part because the Shi'ites refuse to bend to demands by secular, Kurdish and Sunni parties that Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari not be given a second term. Al-Hakim didn't want to confront his fellow Shi'ite. But he had another idea: Couldn't Khalilzad nudge al-Jaafari aside? Khalilzad kept a straight face at the suggestion. But as his convoy speeds through the streets of Baghdad toward the relative safety of the highly fortified green zone, Khalilzad chuckles wearily, knowing that for the U.S., al-Hakim's proposal is not a solution but a trap. "Whether it works or not," he says, "they will blame it on me."

That's a familiar situation for Khalilzad these days. As Iraq's political parties squabble over the nature and composition of a new government, sectarian violence has pushed the country closer than ever to full-bore civil war. U.S. commanders believe that Sunni-Shi'ite violence is surpassing jihadi terrorism as the biggest threat to the country's long-term stability. And yet the prospect of a deeper, more vicious war has so far failed to prod the country's leaders into setting aside their rivalries and forming a broadly representative government, which may be the U.S.'s best hope for subduing the insurgency. The task of bringing together Iraqis torn by bloodshed and ill will has fallen to Khalilzad, the gregarious, glad-handing Afghan-born diplomat, who says he enjoys "getting my hands dirty in the grubby aspects of politics and policymaking." But the dilemma for Khalilzad is the one facing the Bush Administration as it tries to find an honorable way out of Iraq: Once you get your hands dirty, how do you avoid being held responsible for cleaning up the mess?

Khalilzad is searching for answers. TIME accompanied him last week on a whirlwind round of parleys with the key political players, providing a glimpse into how he navigates through the complexities of Iraqi politics. He revealed plans to hold a conference at which he hopes to press Iraq's political leaders to reach agreement on a new, pluralistic government of national unity. "We'll work together day and night until we finish the job," he says. Khalilzad told TIME that if the conference succeeds and the parties settle other disputed issues, the U.S. may be able to pull out some troops this year. "If we get--when we get--the national-unity government, when we have ministries that are run by competent ministers, and as we get into the next phase of our Sunni outreach ... I see a set of circumstances, frankly, that would allow for a significant withdrawal of our forces."

But none of that is assured. In the eight months since taking over as U.S. envoy in Baghdad, Khalilzad, 54, has earned the respect of both his Iraqi counterparts and his bosses in Washington for the enthusiasm and savvy he brings to the world's toughest job. "Right place, right guy, at the right time," says a U.S. official involved in Iraq policy. And yet the burden of trying to find a political solution to an increasingly brutal, costly and unpopular war is straining even Khalilzad's relentless optimism. He says he believes Iraq is "heading in the right direction," but those who know him say he is aware that he may be powerless to stop Iraq's unraveling. A recent visitor to Iraq who saw Khalilzad says he privately complained that he needs more help from Washington to apply international pressure on Iraq's warring parties. (He tells TIME he's happy with the support he's getting from the Administration.) "What is exasperating for him," says his wife Cheryl Benard, a senior political scientist at the Rand Corp., "is to find himself dealing with ... agendas at play in Iraq on the part of some leading Iraqis that have nothing whatsoever to do with the good or advancement of stability in their own country."

KHALILZAD DIDN'T PLAN TO BE there. He became ambassador to Afghanistan after the fall of the Taliban in 2001 and built a close friendship with Afghan President Hamid Karzai, helping negotiate deals with ethnic and sectarian groups so numerous it would make an Iraqi's head spin. "Zal had definitively been promised that if he agreed to go to Kabul, he would be given a more relaxed and family-friendly assignment thereafter," says Benard. But last June, with the U.S. struggling to contain the insurgency in Iraq, President Bush sent Khalilzad to Baghdad. It made sense: Khalilzad was an

early proponent of regime change and had worked with Iraqi exiles in the run-up to the U.S. invasion. "He was already on first-name terms with many of the key players," says a senior diplomat at a European embassy in Baghdad. "There was no time wasted in measuring each other up. He could get to work directly off the plane."

Whereas his predecessors Paul Bremer and John Negroponte often seemed remote to Iraqi politicians, Khalilzad, a secular Muslim who speaks Farsi and some Arabic, is informal and chatty. In meetings with Iraqi leaders, he sips sweetened black tea and indulges their speechifying without asking for translation. Iraqi leaders say they see him as one of their own, crediting his Afghan upbringing for his accommodating manner. Says Humam Hamoodi, a leading politician of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI): "The way he sits, the way he eats, we feel he's no stranger to us."

It helps too that he has powerful backers in Washington. A protégé of Vice President Dick Cheney, Khalilzad speaks frequently to Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. "He certainly has a freedom of action that others do not," says a U.S. diplomat involved in Middle East issues. During last summer's negotiations over a new constitution, Khalilzad took cell-phone calls from Rice in the presence of Iraqi leaders, giving her updates and assessments, according to a U.S. consultant who observed him. It showed Iraqis he had a direct line to Washington and enhanced trust that he had no hidden agenda. Hamoodi says agreement on the constitution "would have been impossible without him."

But Khalilzad hasn't been able to make the good feelings last. Each side wants him to go to bat for it but suspects him of secretly playing for the other team. "They see everything very much in a zero-sum way," Khalilzad says. That he is of mixed parentage--his late father was a Sunni, his late mother a Shi'ite--doesn't automatically make him a neutral in the eyes of Iraqi politicians. As a representative of the country that smashed the Sunnis' stranglehold on power, he worked hard to overcome their suspicion, only to find himself in the doghouse with the Shi'ites. "He wants to be the hero," says Hamoodi. "He paid more attention to Sunni demands than he did to the Shi'ite demands. So he was no longer the middleman. He was just on the Sunni side."

Shi'ite disgruntlement with Khalilzad reached a peak in late February, when he complained about sectarian abuses by al-Jaafari's Shi'ite government. His thinly disguised target was the Interior Ministry, which Sunnis say employs Shi'ite death squads. Shi'ites interpreted Khalilzad's comments as a threat to their influence. "They thought I was trying to give [the ministry] to the Sunnis," Khalilzad says. And justified or not, some Shi'ites say Khalilzad's slapdown contributed to the rage that erupted after the Feb. 22 terrorist bombing of the sacred Shi'ite shrine in Samarra, which left hundreds dead. "I see what happened in the immediate aftermath of Samarra as a strategic warning to Iraqi society and the Iraqi leadership," Khalilzad says. "If they didn't have a feeling that there was a concerted effort at provoking civil war by the enemies of Iraq, they cannot have any doubts in the aftermath of Samarra."

There's little doubt that the bombing has galvanized Khalilzad's diplomatic efforts, giving him in his meetings with Iraqi leaders an urgent, compelling talking point: the prospect of civil war. But a day spent with the ambassador as he shuttles across Baghdad reveals just how hard it will be for him to forge compromise. At his meeting with al-Hakim, the SCIRI leader's aides nod when Khalilzad says the political deadlock is creating a vacuum that encourages sectarian impulses. But al-Hakim wants to talk instead about the discovery last week of a bus containing the corpses of 18 men, many of them clearly garroted. News reports said the men were Sunnis; al-Hakim says they were Shi'ites. Khalilzad is caught off guard. "The BBC said the men were Sunnis," he says. But al-Hakim angrily insists the victims were Shi'ites, pilgrims returning from a tour of the holy city of Najaf. (Five days after the massacre, the bodies had not yet been identified.) When Khalilzad and al-Hakim leave the room for a private conversation, the aides say the ambassador's appeals are sincere--but too simplistic. "Khalilzad cannot reach the people who are pushing the country toward a civil war," says an aide, asking not to be identified by name. "These are people who won't be bought off or frightened off by the U.S. They have to be defeated, jailed or killed."

"SHI'ITES ALWAYS SEE THEMSELVES AS THE victims," Khalilzad says as his convoy pulls up to the U.S. embassy, temporarily housed in what used to be Saddam Hussein's main palace. But Sunnis too are adept at the politics of victimhood. Later in the day, the ambassador holds a closed-door meeting in his small office with two representatives of the Sunni parties. One of them, Iyad al-Samarrai, then told TIME they asked Khalilzad to have U.S. forces stop the killing of Sunnis by Shi'ite death squads.

Such a request only highlights that Khalilzad has little influence on the forces driving the war. For all his success at bringing Sunni political groups into the mainstream, the insurgency rages on. U.S. efforts to exploit splits between foreign jihadist groups and secular, homegrown insurgents have had only limited success. Equally frustrating is the U.S.'s inability to rein in excesses by the Mahdi Army, the Shi'ite militia loyal to radical cleric Muqtada al-Sadr. Khalilzad concedes that al-Sadr is "a challenge that has to be dealt with." The preferred option would be for Iraqi security forces to take on al-Sadr's militias. But since the support of al-Sadr's faction is critical to al-Jaafari's hold on power, the Prime Minister is unlikely to authorize a crackdown. "Al-Sadr is possibly the greatest source of frustration for the U.S.," says a European diplomat. "Khalilzad knows he is potentially the most destabilizing force in Iraqi politics, but the Americans have zero leverage with him."

Khalilzad's latest idea is to get the Iraqis to decide on a Prime Minister, then hold the equivalent of an off-site meeting, at which they would come up with a framework for multisectarian governance. The plan is clearly based on the 2002 London conference of exiled leaders that Khalilzad presided over. "Sometimes meetings went on until 3 or 4 in the morning," he says as his SUV roars to his next appointment. "That may be what's required to get this job done at a faster pace." A major impediment is the current Prime Minister. Al-Jaafari is clinging to control despite widespread dissatisfaction with his tenure. But Khalilzad is not about to tell him to quit--that, he says, would be interfering in Iraq's politics. "We used to make those decisions--run the place," he says. "But now [the Iraqis] have to take responsibility for their decisions." At 6 p.m., Khalilzad meets al-Jaafari behind closed doors in the Prime Minister's residence and tells him that the political process needs to be started up again and that an all-party coalition government is vital to Iraq's interests. An al-Jaafari aide says the Prime Minister listened politely but made no commitment.

It has been a trying day, and Khalilzad looks exhausted. He may be the most homesick man in U.S. government, having spent the past five years away from Benard and their two sons, now 22 and 14. (It doesn't help that he says he may spend an upcoming break from Baghdad in Afghanistan.) He talks every day to Benard, who describes their communications as "very frustrating--satellite phones and terrible connections and as I have been assured, many fellow listeners in various countries' security agencies." Because of safety concerns, Khalilzad is unable to see much of the country he is trying to save. "What I would like to do is go off on the street," he says. "I don't do that, but I talk to a lot of people."

With so much riding on his words and actions, Khalilzad knows no conversations with Iraqis can be entirely casual. But there are some moments when he can let his diplomatic guard down. Earlier in the day, he visits the palatial home of Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, a Kurd and a longtime U.S. ally. Here, Khalilzad is among friends. Talabani calls him Zal, and offers flattering compliments instead of angry complaints. They make jokes in Farsi and enjoy a Kurdish meal that includes several kinds of breads, pomegranate-infused rice and heaping plates of lamb. The ambassador blushes when the President likens him to the British viceroys of Iraq's past. But he beams as Talabani talks about how Iraqi Kurdistan is prospering in the post-Saddam era. "See," Talabani says to a guest, "occupation is good." After an awkward pause, Khalilzad corrects him. "Liberation, Mr. President," he says. "I think you mean liberation." It says something about the magnitude of Khalilzad's task that even America's friends don't get it right the first time.

To read more of TIME's interview with Ambassador Khalilzad, visit time.com

Sistani and the Democracy Project

National Review

By Andrew C. McCarthy

3/20

There are new revelations about the teachings of Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, the supreme religious authority of Shiite Iraq, who has been lavished with praise here and elsewhere as a leading voice of Muslim moderation, perhaps even worthy of Nobel Peace Prize consideration.

A human-rights group in London which lobbies for homosexuals alleged last week that Sistani had held a press conference in which he'd issued a fatwa setting forth his judgment on gay sex. According to the group, Sistani pronounced that the conduct was "forbidden" and that those who engage in it should be "punished, in fact, killed. The people involved should be killed in the worst, most severe way of killing."

Not wanting to take an interest group's allegation at face value, this report stirred the operators of a blog called "Healing Iraq" to check Sistani's website. I discussed that site here on NRO a few weeks ago in connection with Sistani's stated view that non-Muslims should be considered in the same category as "urine, feces, semen, dead bodies, blood, dogs, pigs, alcoholic liquors, and "the sweat of an animal who persistently eats [unclean things]."

Healing Iraq found a relevant page in the Arabic section of Sistani's site. The page is evidently not available in the English section (suggesting that the grand ayatollah is familiar with the practice, turned into an art form by Yasser Arafat, of shielding gullible Westerners with whom one is ingratiating oneself from some of the more alarming things one says to Arabic-speaking audiences). The Arabic page is here. I've confirmed with language experts that the following translation of the relevant passage is accurate: Q: What is the judgment on sodomy and lesbianism?

A: Forbidden. Those involved in the act should be punished. In fact, sodomites should be killed in the worst manner possible.

Now, NR's editor, my friend Rich Lowry, has written an extremely interesting cover article, called "The 'To Hell with Them' Hawks," in the current print edition of National Review (subscription required). Even for those, like me, who disagree with Rich's conclusions, he has with characteristic insight captured the foreign-policy divide among conservatives as visions of the war on terror edge beyond the waning years of the Bush administration.

Nonetheless, I confess to not being thrilled to recognize myself as among those being labeled a "'To Hell With Them' Hawk"--any more, I imagine, than those of a different bent of mind would appreciate being called "Anything Goes" conservatives, willing to tuck the manifest flaws on which they would base policy under a rug of "polite fiction"--such as that Islam simply must be deemed a "religion of peace," notwithstanding the abundant evidence of sense.

More useful than labels in analyzing the divide are the comparative perceptions about Sistani, who has been regarded as a crucial figure by both supporters and skeptics of the administration's democracy project.

From the skeptical side of the house, these pearls of Sistani's wisdom, including this latest raving about the appropriate Islamic response to gay sex, cannot be blithely disregarded as, to borrow Rich's phrase, "beliefs that seem bizarre to a Westerner"--as if the problem here is our alien ear rather than Sistani's seventh-century mind. Sistani is not merely saying homosexuality is condemnable, a view shared by many a religious tradition. He holds, authoritatively within his tradition, that those who engage in it should be brutally murdered.

It is neither naïve nor reflective of a "lack of imagination" to observe that Sistani's fatwas are powerfully indicative of a coarse view of human life. In fact, they are powerfully indicative of a view that rejects the very humanity of those who do not adhere to Islam (indeed, Islam as Sistani rigorously construes it).

That view is a sine qua non of terrorism. It matters little that Sistani, in the fashion of lip service, is, as Rich observes, "consistent in condemning terrorism." He is a central influence in the Islamic world. That is the world which is, undeniably, the font of virtually all modern terrorism. How surprised, then, should we be to find him giving animating voice to beliefs integral to the pathology that is spurring global barbarism? The pathology that says there is an us and a them, and the them is a sub-human species, not fit to be touched and, at least occasionally, worthy of being "killed in the worst manner possible."

What is dangerously naïve is to conflate two very different, and at times contradictory, goals of American foreign policy: opposition to terrorism and democratic reform in Muslim countries. Let's say one is inclined to suspend disbelief and regard as an "ally" in the struggle against Islamist terrorism someone whose profoundly influential views actually bolster core conceits of the jihadists. That would still not make Sistani an ally in the related but distinct project to build a democracy recognizable as such.

The only democracy the United States should be building is one based on liberty, equality, the inherent dignity of all human beings, and the conviction that authority to rule is reposed in the people rather

than in some external theological or political force. That, surely, is the democracy of President Bush's soaring rhetoric, if not his administration's on-the-ground practice. If we are going to sacrifice American blood and treasure on this project, that better be what we are sacrificing them for.

That project calls for a very long-term cultural evolution, one that may take decades if it can happen at all. It is not achieved by a mere election or two's being given the green-light by a savvy Shiite imam--one who can count, and who sees Shiites outnumbering everyone else by about two-to-one. It is not achieved by a celebrated constitution's being given the green-light by such an imam only after Islam has been installed as the official state religion and the sharia made a primary source of fundamental law.

To believe Sistani is an ally in that project is to hallucinate.

--Andrew C. McCarthy, a former federal prosecutor, is a senior fellow at the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies.

The Other Side of the Story

National Review

By Bill Crawford

3/20

After I recently wrote a piece for NRO reporting on some good news from Iraq, I got a fair number of e-mails criticizing me for trying to distort the actual situation. I never meant to give a comprehensive account of how things are going in Iraq. I'm not, as my grandmother used to say, "trying to put lipstick on a pig." There is a lot of bad news to reports, and I understand that. But the bad news is already being covered in the mainstream media just fine. What's not being covered adequately is the good news. It is impossible to form an accurate opinion of the situation in Iraq unless both the progress and the failures are taken into account. My aim is only to tell the rest of the story--the part most people are not so well acquainted with. And that's what I'll continue here.

To begin with, there was a noteworthy report presented to Congress by General John Abizaid entitled "United States Central Command Posture for 2006." It covered all areas of CENTCOM responsibility, but there are certain parts worth noting that deal with Iraq. First, regarding Iraq's security forces: The most significant change in terms of troop levels in 2005 was the number of trained and equipped Iraqi Security Forces (ISF). In January 2005, there were 127,000 total Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Interior security forces, or 78 battalions. About a year later, there were approximately 231,000 combined security forces constituting more than 160 battalions. More important, these increasingly capable Iraqi forces are assuming greater responsibility for combating the insurgency.

And: In 2004, some Iraqi Army and police units disintegrated when confronted by insurgents. Now they are standing, fighting, and prevailing over the enemy on the battlefield. They are also increasingly planning and conducting independent operations. Iraqi security forces are fighting and dying for their country, taking significantly higher casualties than our own. There is no shortage of Iraqis volunteering to serve their country.

Regarding reconstruction: Over 3,600 schools have been rehabilitated, and over 47,000 school teachers and administrators have been trained. Approximately 240 hospitals and more than 1,200 clinics have reopened. Baghdad's three sewage plants, which serve 80% of the city's population, have been rehabilitated. Thirteen power plants have also been rehabilitated, providing approximately 60% of power generation in Iraq. And Umm Qasar's status as an international port has been restored with up to 80 ship offloads of a wide range of commodities occurring each month.

There's plenty more in the report worth reading--this is just a sampling.

Continuing a theme from my earlier article, al Qaeda has become the hunted in Iraq: Residents reported curious declarations hanging from mosque walls and market stalls recently in Ramadi, the Sunni Muslim insurgent stronghold west of Baghdad. The fliers said Iraqi militants had turned on and were killing foreign al-Qaeda fighters, their one-time allies.

A local tribal leader and Iraq's Defense Ministry have said followers of Jordanian militant Abu Musab al-

Zarqawi, leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq, have begun fleeing Anbar province and Ramadi, its capital, to cities and mountain ranges near the Iranian border.

The leader of one Sunni tribe said that 75 percent of al Qaeda fighters have fled from their one-time stronghold of Anbar Province, and that they have captured and handed over to the government hundreds of foreign fighters. Most interesting is that these Sunnis aren't interested in sectarian violence, which deals another blow to al Qaeda's hopes of a civil war: "We are against the killing of civilians for sectarian or ethnic reasons. That's why we are shedding the blood of Muslim extremists, especially al-Qaeda," said Abul-Rahman Mansheed, a top Sunni politician in Hawija.

In another operation, five members of al Qaeda were killed in Anbar province by local Sunnis.

After originally welcoming the presence of foreign fighters, Sunni insurgents in the region have also turned against al Qaeda: Insurgent groups in one of Iraq's most violent provinces claim they have purged the region of three-quarters of al Qaeda's supporters after forming an alliance to force out the foreign fighters.

If true, this would mark a significant victory in the fight against Abu Musab Zarqawi, the head of al Qaeda in Iraq, and could partly explain the considerable drop in suicide bombings in Iraq recently.

Ralph Peters also noted the unpopularity of al Qaeda in Iraq: Expanding terrorism. On the contrary, foreign terrorists, such as Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, have lost ground. They've alienated Iraqis of every stripe. Iraqis regard the foreigners as murderers, wreckers and blasphemers, and they want them gone. The Samarra attack may, indeed, have been a tipping point--against the terrorists.

Foreign terrorists leaving Anbar have relocated to central and eastern Iraq. A major attack will be launched there in the near future to rid that area of any foreign terrorists: Army Maj. Gen. Anwar Mohammed Amin, in the nearby city of Kirkuk, said the military soon would launch a major attack, with help from the local tribesmen, to clear that region of al-Qaida as well.

Operation Swarmer is right on time. Here is the progress reported so far, as of Saturday, March 18: Iraqi and Coalition forces continue to search a 100-square-mile area for terrorists northeast of Samarra as Operation Swarmer progresses.

So far troops have detained approximately 50 people and released 17, while approximately 30 remain in custody for tactical interviews.

Initial reports indicate six caches have been uncovered containing mortar rounds and rockets of various calibers, bomb-making materials, land mines and rocket propelled grenades.

Moqtada al-Sadr has called for Musab al Zarqawi to be declared a non-believer: Iraqi Shiite leader Moqtada Al-Sadr called upon all Iraqi parties and classes to join in signing a memorandum calling for peace and calm, and asking the Iraqi Sunni clergies to declare Al-Zarqawi and his followers infidels.

Another sign of progress against terrorists in Iraq is that the number of foreign fighters flowing into the country from Syria is down.

CNN has chosen not only to ignore all this bad news for al Qaeda in Iraq, but is posting stories about how successful Zarqawi is and how the local tribes are loyal to him.

A group of Iraqi veterans said recently that U.S. and Coalition forces are "getting the job done" against terrorists in Iraq: "I am not here to debate the choices that were made, only to tell you that today, the job is getting done" in Iraq, Marine Corporal Richard Gibson said during a news conference hosted by the conservative group America's Majority at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C.

Gibson based his optimistic assessment of the situation in Iraq on several factors, including the strength of coalition forces. "The old Iraqi army was no match for what we, the Marines, had to offer and neither is the insurgency," he said.

They should know. More on the press conference.

In related news, members of an Arizona National Guard MP unit recently returned from Iraq, proud of

what they had accomplished: "We got the Iraqi police on their feet and headed in the right direction," explained Palmer. "I hope the people back home continue to give us a chance to do our job--and they too will start seeing the changes."

Marine Corporal Paul Bennett expressed similar feelings of pride: "Every day we have the opportunity to get weapons out of the hands of insurgents or make some building a little safer to work in," Barajas said. "It makes me proud to know I am helping to save Marines lives."

Pride is evident even among wounded troops: Durgala's injuries haven't dampened his aspirations to make a career out of the military but his slight limp may prevent him from rejoining the infantry. While he knows there will always be people who question military actions like those in Iraq, he said he would "go back in a heartbeat."

"They don't actually see the way (Iraqi) people's faces light up when we walk down the street," Durgala said. "We're there to help them."

With great soldiers and Marines like Durgala, is it any wonder we are winning?

The media is full of stories about kidnappings in Iraq, but one rarely hears about the ones that end in a rescue. In one particular case the rescue was performed by an elite anti-terror unit of the Iraqi army, which could explain the silence: "Jackpot!" American advisers shouted after members of the Iraqi Counter Terrorism Force, or ICTF, blew open the building's front door and found the haggard and bruised hostage in a pitch-black, concrete room. The elderly man threw one free arm into the air and shouted for the Iraqis to free him as other members of the unit chased down and captured three of the suspected kidnappers.

We have witnessed plenty of failures in reporting about Iraq, most recently after the attack on the Golden Mosque in Samarra. Lt. General Peter Chiarelli discussed the problem recently: "I recall reports of hundreds of mosques attacked and 30 mosques burning in Baghdad one night," said Chiarelli. "These reports were terribly inaccurate." The general explained that watching the news reports led him and the rest of the world to believe Iraq's thousands of mosques were all under attack, but as Coalition forces physically checked the 81 reports of damaged mosques, they found only 17 damaged, two completely destroyed and none burned.

The Iraqi air force opened a new base in Baghdad: "It is important for Iraqis," said Maj. Gen. Kamal of the base. "It is important for them to see tangible results and cooperation," he said. "Building up an air force takes so much work, finance and dedication."

Although Iraq's Air Force is much smaller now compared to Saddam's, now it is better than before, said Col. Jabber. "Now our Air Force supports the government and the people. In the past the Air Force only supported Saddam," he said. "We are humanitarian now."

Soldiers of the 5th Iraqi army division uncovered 30 weapons caches in just eleven days. There is a reason this should be newsworthy: "This type of operation denies the anti-Iraqi forces resources. It costs them their money, it costs them their mobility and it costs them their time," said Maj. Thomas Baccardi, the S-3 operations officer in charge for 3rd HBCT, 4ID, Task Force Band of Brothers. "Efforts in this regard disrupt their tempo and facilitates our ability to target their nodes."

Many stories from Iraq report on the actions of American combat engineers, and the hazardous duty of disarming IEDs. The Iraqi army also has EOD teams of its own: An Iraqi Explosive Ordnance Disposal team helped make a route east of Baghdad safer March 11 by ridding it of a roadside bomb found by Multi-National Division--Baghdad Soldiers.

They also have their own snipers.

Another theme from my earlier article was the increasing number of tip-offs being provided by Iraqis to security forces. This trend continues. Eight suspected insurgents were captured after a tip from an Iraqi citizen. In Tikrit, a tip resulted in the discovery of a weapons and explosives cache. Tips from Iraqis were a main driving force behind Operation Swarmer.

U.S. soldiers from the 4th ID found a weapons cache so large that it will severely hamper the enemy's IED capability: The cache consisted of 30 antennas, 595 relays, 1,000 transistors, one Kenwood

charger, three Kenwood batteries, two remote-control timers, one cell phone, 64 two-way radios and two bags of bomb-making material.

EOD technicians estimated that the cache seized took 637 roadside bombs from terrorists' hands.

From the "Winning Hearts & Minds" file, members of the 4th ID delivered supplies to an orphanage in central Baghdad: "Giving gifts to people is probably one of the best things we do here in Iraq," said U.S. Army Capt. Scott Ginsburg, civil affairs officer, Company A, 425th Civil Affairs Battalion.

After my earlier report was posted here at NRO, I received many e-mails arguing that stories about our troops delivering supplies to schools or orphanages just don't count as important news. This is flat-out wrong. From the same story: According to Ginsburg, every civil affairs mission is gratifying, and establishing good relationships is essential to help perpetuate peace for the Iraqi people.

An international airport is being planned in Najaf. Financing for the project is being provided with low interest loans: The USD73.8 million facility, to be known as Imam Ali International Airport, is being built around an old Iraqi air force base with a two-mile-long asphalt runway that is big enough to take jumbo jets. The control tower will be shaped like the minaret of a mosque, underlining Najaf's stature as the holiest city in Shia Islam.

Iraq's stock exchange is about to get a makeover. The \$6 million upgrade will include the installation of an electronic trading system. The stock exchange has grown significantly in the last two years, with 700 million shares now traded each session, and that figure is expected to jump 500 percent after the electronic trading system goes online.

The United Arab Emirates announced plans to build three new hospitals in Iraq. One hospital will be built in each of three Iraqi cities: Sadr City in Baghdad, the Kurdish city of Sulaimaniya, and in the southern city of Nasiriya. In addition, the UAE will be funding mobile medical clinics to provide health care to remote parts of the country.

USAID's economic assistance has been critical in increasing the opportunities for women in Iraq: Nearly 60 percent of the small business development grants administered by USAID in the reconstruction effort have been awarded to women. The newly-formed Iraq Investment Promotion Agency (IIPA) is composed entirely of women trained in economic development and investment promotion. A grant for nearly \$1.3 million is being finalized for a women-focused international Micro Finance Institute, combining loans with one-on-one technical assistance to develop business ideas.

Iraq's communication and media commission has called for bids on mobile telecommunications licenses. Cell phone use in Iraq has increased 300 percent in just the last twelve months.

Opponents of the war are touting a recent poll released by Zogby that says U.S. troops serving in Iraq are now against the war, but as this economist notes, the results can hardly be termed accurate: For example, the widespread finding that three in four soldiers think the United States should withdraw from Iraq within a year has only one option for troops who think otherwise: stay indefinitely. This infamous question asks, "How long should U.S. troops stay in Iraq?" But the first three answers are not phrased in terms of staying, they are phrased "withdraw...," "withdraw..." and "withdraw... ." Where are the options for troops who think the United States should stay for "one to two years" or "two to five years"? Zogby omits such nuance. It's stay or go. Now or never.

Recently released documents reveal that not even Saddam's top military leaders knew the country had no WMD stockpiles: A report by the U.S. military shows that even top commanders of the Iraqi army didn't know that there were no WMD(\$ only): [Saddam] was so secretive and kept information so compartmentalized that his top military leaders were stunned when he told them three months before the war that he had no weapons of mass destruction, and they were demoralized because they had counted on using the hidden stocks of poison gas or germ weapons.

One of the main reasons Saddam kept up the charade of having WMDs is because he feared an Israeli attack, and senior Iraqi officials still believed they possessed WMDs months after Saddam fell: "According to Chemical Ali, Hussein was asked about the weapons during a meeting with members of the Revolutionary Command Council. He replied that Iraq did not have weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) but flatly rejected a suggestion that the regime remove all doubts to the contrary," the report states. Ali explained that such a declaration could encourage Israel to attack, the report says.

None of this will end the anti-war Left's tired mantra of "Bush lied, people died," but it should convince most rational Americans that our government did not know that WMD stockpiles didn't exist, and had good reason to believe otherwise.

One last thing: The documents reveal that Iraq was aware of al Qaeda's presence in the country.

There is another twist in the WMD story. A former Iraqi air force general says that Iraq's WMDs were moved to Syria just prior to start of the war. According to General Sada, 56 flights were required to move the weapons. These allegations are supported by two of the pilots, as well as other former Iraqi military officers.

The president is giving a series of speeches on the war. CBS chose not to air them, but did air the results of a recent poll: In laying out on Monday's CBS Evening News a series of poll findings, including how 66 percent feel Bush has been describing the "things in Iraq" as "better than they are," both skipped the finding that, while the media fare better than Bush, nearly a third (31 percent) say the media "make things sound worse in Iraq than they really are," compared to 24 percent who perceive the media are describing things "better than they are" and 35 percent who think journalism on Iraq "accurately" reflects the situation.

In a speech on March 14, the one that CBS chose to ignore, the president said that most security would be handed over to Iraqi Security Forces by the end of the year: President Bush vowed for the first time Monday to turn over most of Iraq to newly trained Iraqi troops by the end of this year, setting a specific benchmark as he kicked off a fresh drive to reassure Americans alarmed by the recent burst of sectarian violence.

The president reiterated our policy that "as Iraqis stand up, we will stand down." We did the same in post-World War II Germany and Japan. As their governments and security forces became more capable, the U.S. role was diminished.

The Iraqis are in fact standing up. On March 9, Forward Operating Base Hope was transferred to Iraqi control. The 3rd Battalion, 2nd Brigade, 6th Iraqi Army Division will now patrol Sadr City in Baghdad: The ceremony reflects the increasing responsibility for the Iraqis as their army gains control of more battle space throughout the region.

Restive Anbar Province will soon be under the control of the Iraqi army. If you listen to what Iraqi soldiers have to say, you realize it isn't much different from what an American soldier might say: "The terrorists are just like Saddam," he said. "Explosions, killing, robbery--all terrorism. If I had authority, I would kill the terrorists directly."

He said most of the Iraqi soldiers here are truly dedicated to the new Iraqi government, and are not part of Iraq's new army "just for the money."

"We are all eager to serve Iraq and be a part of Iraq's future," said Muhammed, who added that voting in last year's national elections was a freedom he never thought he'd live to see in Iraq. "I was afraid to show my (ink-stained) finger because the terrorists, they could kill me."

"Only thing we want is safety. I want my family to walk down the streets without any guards or any protection," said Muhammed. He said he is anxiously waiting for that day, but for now, Iraqis "don't have that freedom."

The amount of battle space controlled by Iraqis has tripled since January, and they now control 50 percent of the country. That figure will rise to 75 percent by the end of August 2006. There are now 130 Iraqi battalions fighting against terrorists in Iraq.

Bolstered by poll numbers showing support for the war decreasing, opponents are pushing hard with an agenda that would end our presence in Iraq, but they conveniently never address the consequences such actions would have.

A report by the Canadian Security Intelligence Service makes it clear that a U.S. withdrawal would have disasterous consequences if a stable government isn't in place: A secret study by Canada's spy agency says insurgents wreaking havoc in Iraq would see a U.S. withdrawal of troops as "a significant

victory" unless Baghdad first has a stable government.

The Canadian Security Intelligence Service paints a bleak picture of "dire proportions" in which determined fighters are exploiting divisions between the Shiite majority and Sunni minority in Iraq.

Headlines reading "Iraq is a mess" greeted many of us back on March 13. The story was about remarks made by Britain's Foreign Office Minister Kim Howells. Like so much of the reporting about Iraq, the headline was somewhat misleading. Mr. Howells also expressed optimism about Iraq's future, and said that the situation there was better than what the media was reporting. He added that it was a "mess" the world could live with: "But it is a mess that can't launch an attack now on Iran; a mess that won't be able to march into Kuwait; it's a mess that can't develop nuclear weapons. So yes it's a mess but it's starting to look like the sort of mess that most of us live in."

During his visit to Iraq, Howells noted that the Iraqi people share in his optimism: 'I have been struck by the optimism of those I have met. Iraqis from all walks of life are determined to resist those fomenting sectarian violence. I have heard how the Iraqi security forces have taken the lead in doing this in the south. There is more to do to ensure their impartiality and effectiveness, but Iraqi forces outnumber the international forces and are increasingly capable.

People who actually go to Iraq are more optimistic about the progress there. A four-member delegation of Georgia Republicans follows this pattern: "Their morale is good and strong," Gingrey said. "It's because of the men and women of the 48th that we are winning the war."

The brigade has built a generating plant for a town that never had electricity, built a school to replace a mud structure and dug wells to provide fresh water to a town where children were being sickened from filthy, contaminated water, according to the lawmakers.

They saw two young children who had been badly burned by an exploding kerosine heater being treated at a 48th Brigade field hospital.

In addition, they noted that several members of Georgia's 48th Infantry Brigade Combat Team reenlisted while serving in Iraq.

Four governors--three Republicans and one Democrat--are in Iraq this week. It should surprise no one at this point that they don't see eye to eye with the media on the situation there. Governor Bresden (R., Tenn.) commented: "It's no miracle, (but it is happening) one step at a time," he said. "The level of commitment of the soldiers and the officers to making that happen is difficult for the media to cover ... but it's happening. And I think it's great (because the sooner that happens, the sooner troops) can come back home."

During his time in Iraq, Ralph Peters also noticed a disconnect between what the media is reporting about Iraq and the reality on the ground. Here are a few excerpts concerning the progress of Iraq's security forces and reconstruction: The failure of the Iraqi army. Instead, the past month saw a major milestone in the maturation of Iraq's military. During the mini-crisis that followed the Samarra bombing, the Iraqi army put over 100,000 soldiers into the country's streets. They defused budding confrontations and calmed the situation without killing a single civilian. And Iraqis were proud to have their own army protecting them. The Iraqi army's morale soared as a result of its success.

Reconstruction efforts have failed. Just not true. The American goal was never to rebuild Iraq's infrastructure in its entirety. Iraqis have to do that. Meanwhile, slum-dwellers utterly neglected by Saddam Hussein's regime are getting running water and sewage systems for the first time. The Baathist regime left the country in a desolate state while Saddam built palaces. The squalor has to be seen to be believed. But the hopeless now have hope.

As I alluded to earlier, Peters also points to the aftermath of the Golden Mosque bombing as a sign that Iraq's Security Forces are getting better. Security after the attack was an all-Iraqi affair, involving 100,000 troops. David Ignatius noticed the same thing.

Iranian writer Amir Taheri sees signs of hope that democracy can take root in Iraq: The war, which was not designed to impose democracy by force, has succeeded in removing most of the structural obstacles to democratisation. The one-party state has been dismantled along with its octopus like security services. A system built around the cult of the leader has been discredited in favour of

advancing the rights of the individual citizen. For the first time, Iraqis have a genuine opportunity to build a pluralist system based on the rule of law.

General Abizaid told a congressional subcommittee last week that Arabs in other countries are taking notice of democracy in Iraq: "It's interesting when I go around the rest of the Arab world; everybody wants to talk about Iraqi politics," Army Gen. John Abizaid told a congressional subcommittee on military and veterans affairs. "That's interesting because they can talk about Iraqi politics, but can't necessarily talk about politics in their own countries."

Abizaid also noted that insurgent attacks are down.

During a press conference recently, General Abizaid said that the current situation in Iraq should allow for the U.S. to begin drawing down the number of troops stationed in the country. General Abizaid repeated his assertion that the country is not "on the verge" of a civil war: "I understand everybody talks about 'the verge of civil war.' I don't believe that we're close to civil war. I believe a civil war is possible if a long series of events or a bad series of events takes place," Abizaid said.

Iraqis are showing that they choose unity over civil war. They are starting to exercise their new freedom by marching against the recent sectarian violence. Sunnis, Shiites, Christians and Kurds joined together on the streets: At least 2,500 Shiite, Sunni, Christian and Kurdish Iraqis demonstrated on Tuesday in two separate protests in response to ongoing sectarian violence which has taken the lives of a growing number of Iraqi security forces and civilians in recent weeks.

The attack on the Golden Mosque was a turning point, as the terrorists who perpetrated it hoped it would be. Unfortunately for them, the situation has turned against them. Iraqi security forces maintained order and the Iraqi people, and their leaders, made it clear that they could not be pulled in to a civil war.

Critics of the situation in Iraq seem to have unrealistic ideas about what we should expect, and what counts as a good situation there. We simply are not going to have--in the near future, at least--a country with no Zarqawi, no religious strife, no car bombs and no corruption. But Iraq be stable and unthreatening while still falling short of perfection.

Critics argue that we broke it and now we have to fix it. This requires us not only to pick up the broken pieces, but to start with a new block of clay and fashion it in to a beautiful new vase. This is not only unrealistic, it's unnecessary. The more probable fix, and the one I prefer, is for us to leave Iraq as a functioning democracy that does not threaten its neighbors, or the world.

Violence in Iraq could go on for decades, but that doesn't diminish our success there. Middle Eastern countries, and especially Iraq with its tribal feuds, are far more violent than Americans are used to. Disputes between families are often settled at gunpoint, and we shouldn't be surprised if this carries over into the political arena. The day may come when there are no more foreign terrorists in Iraq, but the country will still be a violent place. In light of this fact, it is important to look at what we have accomplished. The Iraqis have held three free and fair elections in twelve months, written a new constitution in the same amount of time, the economy is growing, Iraqis are optimistic their future, and the country is no longer a threat to us or its neighbors. We should continue to help the Iraqis strive toward a better life, but we should be honest about the situation. Just three years after decades of tyranny and neglect were ended America can be proud of what it has accomplished in Iraq. In short, Iraq is already a success

Finally, how about a story with all the hallmarks of divine intervention? Read on: "He said when he tossed [the booby-trapped phone], it exploded and threw him back 20 feet and 10 feet in the air. When he was airborne that is when he was shot in the left leg," Chris said.

But when the bullet ripped through his fatigues, it suddenly stopped: deflected away by a metal cross Kyle had with him.

"He tied it to his dog tags, which were tied to the belt loop in his pocket," Chris said.

Had that location been any different, the member of the 101st Airborne's Screaming Eagles likely would be dead.

"Where it was in his pocket, it was right around the main artery."

What a great story, and the perfect way to end this installment. See you all next week.

--Bill Crawford lives in San Antonio, Texas. He blogs at All Things Conservative.

Republic of Fear

Daily Standard

By Dan Darling

3/21

When the Iraqi regime collapsed in April 2003, few observers saw reason to mourn the loss of Saddam's brutal dictatorship. While a great deal of information about the former Iraqi regime's assorted atrocities has been uncovered since the invasion, newly-released documents go even further in demonstrating its manifest depravity.

One such document is CMPC-2003-012666, a letter from Qusay Hussein that directs as follows:

Transfer all Kuwaiti POW's / a total of 448 captured Kuwaitis who are located at the Al-Nida Al-Agher Prison and the Intelligence / General Center and Kazema Prison in Al-Kazema, to make them human shields at all locations that are expected to be attacked by the American aggressors. Put them in communication locations and essential ministries, radio and television, Military Industrial Commissions, and all other locations expected to be attacked by the criminal Anglo-American aggressors.

In addition to the barbarity of using prisoners as human shields, it should be noted that these documents constitute a clear refutation of the official position of the Iraqi government, which claimed from 1996 onwards that while it had taken 126 Kuwaitis prisoner during the Gulf War, they were no longer in Iraqi custody. Clearly, the Iraqi regime had no intention of releasing all of its Gulf War prisoners under any circumstances, but rather chose to retain them for the apparent purpose of creating the appearance of civilian casualties for propaganda purposes during the U.S. bombing campaign.

In a similar vein is CMPC-2004-002219-0, which lays out a series of memos between Saddam's office, Iraqi military intelligence, and the Iraqi army in order to draw up plans to attack Kurdish guerrilla bases. As these memos make clear, international treaties banning the use of chemical weapons (referred to throughout the memos with the euphemism "special equipment") were of little interest to Saddam Hussein:

1. Based on our Directorate's suggestion, an approval from the Secretary of the Presidency Office was obtained to strike, using special equipment, the quarters of Iran's agents in (Tkiyya, Bilkjar) basin next to Karah Dag, and (Balisan) basin located on the main road next to Jawarkornah-Khlayfan, and do not execute this strike before informing the Secretary of the Presidency Office on how to implement it.

. . . 1. Operations to fight the saboteurs and agents of Iran and Khomeini Guards in your regions, using special equipment are sanctioned as follows:

A. Bases of Iran's agents in Balisan Basin(Balisan village-Totama-Ghitti-Sheikh Wisan) located next to the main road next to Khlayfan.

B. Bases of Iran's agents in village basins of (Tkiyyeh-Biljkar-Siyusnan, in the Karah Dag vicinity.

. . . 1. The President/Leader (may God save him) ordered our directorate to study, with the professionals, directing a surprise strike against (Khomeini Guards bases located within the quarters of the first division of Barazani's saboteurs) using special equipment, and the possibility of executing it in any of the following methods (Air Force, Army Air Force, artillery).

. . . 4. The above mentioned targets, in paragraphs(A-B) under item 3, are important bases for Iran's agents and members of Iranian enemies, are far away (as targets for special equipment) from our units. They are considered more appropriate than others to strike with our equipment for being located in low regions which helps the chemical fumes to settle. We can also treat them with available ways (air force, tubular bombers, Samtiyyat (Helicopters) and at night

5. Our directorate suggested striking both targets, referred to in item 3, during this period using two thirds of available special equipment (Ricin) plus one third of available special equipment (Mustard Gas) and keeping the balance for emergency situations that might arise in the operation theater.

6. The top secret, personal and urgent letter No.953/965/k dated March 29, 87 from the President's Office Secretary, stated the following:

"Approval of striking has been obtained provided the results are exploited . . . for the purpose is not only to inflict losses among the saboteurs, but also to coordinate with the Corps . . . please advice prior to striking".

The mention of targeting Iranians as well as Kurds with chemical weapons may strike some Western observers as unusual, but it is worth remembering that Iran has historically supported Iraqi Kurds against the central government going back to the 1970s and that Iranian troops attacked Iraqi positions from the northern Kurdish areas in 1988 in the hopes of relieving pressure on their southern front.

It is important that we enumerate the atrocities carried out under Saddam's auspices. Those who died at the hands of his regime deserve nothing less.

-- Dan Darling is a counterterrorism consultant for the Manhattan Institute Center for Policing Terrorism.

ISRAEL

You're Nicked – Again

Economist

No author given

3/18

A few weeks ago, it was dangerous to be Danish in Palestine; now it is the Brits and Americans who are the unflavour-of-the-month. On March 14th, the three British monitors supervising the detention of six of Israel's top public enemies at a Palestinian Authority (PA) jail in Jericho finished their watch and left, but no replacement team showed up. Israeli troops, watching nearby, correctly deduced that Britain and the United States were keeping a promise made on March 8th to both the PA and the Israelis that they were going to withdraw the monitors. The Israelis attacked, and after a nine-hour siege that claimed remarkably few casualties (two dead prison guards), captured the prisoners alive. In response, furious Palestinians set fire to the British Council offices in Gaza, and several foreigners were kidnapped in Gaza and the West Bank, only to be released unharmed soon afterwards.

The monitors were there as part of a deal struck in 2002, when Israel agreed to lift its siege of Yasser Arafat's compound in Ramallah, where the six men were hiding out, in return for their handover. Among them was Ahmad Saadat, a leader of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), who was believed to have planned the assassination of Rehavam Zeevi, a right-wing Israeli cabinet minister. Israel agreed to let the men stay in a PA jail, so long as there was foreign supervision. But the supervisors had never been happy with the poor security provisions for the unarmed monitors and the lax conditions for the prisoners, who were, for instance, allowed to use mobile phones. Israel suspects that Mr Saadat used one to plan a suicide bombing from his cell.

After Mr Saadat won a seat in the Palestinian parliament last January on the PFLP list, the organisation began calling on the Palestinian president, Mahmoud Abbas, to release him. Hamas, which won a majority in the legislature, said that it would let him go once it formed a government. That seems to have tipped the balance for the British and the Americans: rather than wait for the prisoners to be set free, and risk having their monitors caught in an Israeli attack, they pulled out pre-emptively. Israel, they say, knew nothing about it before March 8th, though Israel's Haaretz newspaper reports that the Israeli plans had been laid weeks before. (The army refused to comment.)

Opening the way to an Israeli siege would have been a sensitive matter at the best of times. But with foreign donors engaged in backroom debates about the extent to which they should cut funding for,

and contact with, a Hamas-run PA, Palestinians inevitably wonder whether the pullout of the monitors was just the beginning of a process of abandonment, or even of a strategy of deliberate destabilisation of the PA, which some American and Israeli officials are known to favour. Ironically, if so, the most destabilised might be not Hamas, but the moderate Mr Abbas.

Will other projects in which foreign officials work directly with the PA be axed too, such as the EU-supervised Rafah border crossing between Gaza and Egypt, or the training provided for the authority's security forces? The donors are still undecided, waiting for Hamas to form its government. Hamas, meanwhile, is still trying to clinch a deal with other factions in an attempt to set up a possible government of national unity.

For Israel's ruling Kadima party, the timing of the Jericho prison siege, however coincidental, could not have been better. It had been slipping in the polls; its leader, Ehud Olmert, lacking the public's trust in his militaristic predecessor, Ariel Sharon, had found that he could not afford to affect Mr Sharon's studied vagueness about the future. Last weekend he finally outlined both the borders he thought Israel should have, and the length of time—a mere four years—that it should take to get to them, most likely unilaterally, thus giving up some of its West Bank settlements.

That clarity of purpose has boosted Kadima's ratings, according to a poll by state television just before the prison siege. And thanks to the success of the siege, Mr Olmert's hard-man credentials are now stronger too. Few now doubt that a coalition led by Kadima, with Labour as the second biggest party, will be forming Israel's next government.

The Shape of Things to Come

Economist

No author given

3/18

If you are trying to work out the rights and wrongs of Israel's murky raid on Jericho's prison this week, you have your work cut out. The rights and wrongs depend entirely on what you think the Palestinian Authority (PA), under whose control the six men Israel wanted were held, is actually for. And what you think the PA is for depends largely on what you think about the bigger rights and wrongs of the conflict in Palestine. The real significance of the Jericho episode resides not in whether it was a pre-election stunt by Israel, or whether there was collusion between the Israelis and the British, as some have speculated (see page 56). It is that Jericho was a perfect, worked example of the shape of things to come once a new Israeli government squares off next month against a new Palestinian Authority run by the Islamists of Hamas.

The facts of the Jericho case are simply stated. Israel said it snatched the men because it had an agreement which the PA was about to break. Israel's target was Ahmad Saadat, a Palestinian the Israelis accuse of having ordered the murder of one of their cabinet ministers. Israel had cornered Mr Saadat before, when he hid in Yasser Arafat's besieged Ramallah compound in 2002. That siege ended with a compromise: the PA would lock up the wanted men in Jericho, if American and British monitors made sure the Palestinians kept their word.

That the Palestinians broadly did, even though Mr Saadat was given rather more liberty during his incarceration than the monitors had stipulated. He was able, for example, to campaign for and win a seat in the Palestinian parliament in January's election. The same election brought victory for Hamas. Its leaders see Mr Saadat as a hero, not a murderer. They said they intended to let Mr Saadat and his friends go. Mahmoud Abbas, the PA's president, hinted that he would agree. From that moment, the Israelis resolved to prevent this from happening. As soon as the international monitors left, the Jericho deal was in effect dead and Israel pounced.

The quarrel in Jericho sums up the lethal ambiguity that now pervades all relations between Israel, the PA and the outside world. Israel says the authority's job is not only to run the West Bank and Gaza but also to prevent violent attacks on Israel. That was the essence of the Oslo bargain Arafat agreed to in return for being allowed to bring his Palestine Liberation Organisation back from exile and set up shop in Palestine itself. When the intifada broke out six years ago, the PA's observance of the bargain became increasingly notional. Why, after all, was the supposed killer of an Israeli cabinet minister given refuge in the Arafat compound? But when it was under the control of Arafat's Fatah organisation,

the PA did at least continue to pay lip service to Oslo. Mr Abbas still does.

The incoming Hamas government does not. It calls "resistance" the right of any occupied people. In this it speaks for most Palestinians, whose faith in Oslo vanished with Israel's continued colonisation of the occupied territories and its violent response to the intifada. So what if Mr Saadat ordered the killing of an Israeli minister, ask Palestinians. Didn't Ariel Sharon rub out Hamas's entire leadership, from Sheikh Ahmed Yassin down? On paper, relations between the sides are still governed by rules, from the Oslo agreement to the Jericho deal to the "road map". But the Jericho raid shows that, especially with the advent of Hamas, all these rules are on the brink of becoming null and void.

With no rules at all, how will Israelis and Palestinians co-exist, armed to the teeth and crammed cheek-by-jowl in a contested patch of land? Forget peacemaking: neither the rest of the world nor Israel has worked out how or whether to deal with Hamas. Optimists had hoped at best for a period of calm as a pragmatic Hamas consolidates and a pragmatic Israel makes another unilateral withdrawal. The lesson from Jericho is bleaker. Without at least tacit co-operation between Israel and Hamas, even a temporary calm may be too much hope for.

HAMAS

In No Uncertain Terms

U.S. News & World Report
By Mortimer B. Zuckerman
3/20

How can Europe even begin to think about subsidizing terrorism? That would be the effect of the stealth efforts to keep money flowing to Palestine despite its takeover by Hamas. The quaint notion that this terrorist organization will change its spots doesn't survive even a moment's scrutiny. A video message on the Hamas website proclaims: "We are a nation that drinks blood, and we know that there is no blood better than the blood of the Jews."

But the lust to kill Jews is only part of it. Hamas, like Osama bin Laden and Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, has ambitions that threaten us all. Khaled Mashal, Hamas's top leader, spelled them out: "The nation of Islam will sit at the throne of the world ... Muhammad is gaining victory in Palestine [and] in Iraq. ... The Arab and Islamic nation is rising and awakening. ... Tomorrow we will lead the world." Not to be outdone is the Hamas leader in Gaza, Mahmoud al-Zahar: "We are part of the great world plan whose name is the world Islamic movement." According to the Jerusalem Post, the Hamas victory will "lift the morale of the Arab and Islamic world and affect the battle for Afghanistan and Iraq."

Just a few days before the Palestinian election, Ahmadinejad met Mashal and Hamas's other leader-in-exile, Musa Abu Marzuk, in Damascus, along with the leaders of nine other Syria-based terrorist groups. The Palestinian conflict, they concluded, will become a "focal point of the final war" between Islam and the West. Hezbollah has already moved its operational headquarters from Beirut to Gaza; al Qaeda elements are already there.

These are omens of an evil confluence, the formation of a Tehran-Damascus-Hezbollah-Gaza axis in which Iran will fund and arm a new front of terrorism with its head in Iran, its body in Iraq and Lebanon, and its feet in Gaza and the West Bank. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran's leader, warned that financial aid to the Palestinians would be conditional on continued terror and resistance against Israel.

It is important to understand that what fuels such fanaticism isn't just the existence of a democratic Israel or even U.S. policy. To think this is to underestimate the depth of a set of shared political and religious fantasies. Hamas's election victory, on top of advances by Islamists in Iraq, Lebanon, and Egypt, has energized and unified the radicals. This is no longer a political conflict about borders and identity. Militant Islam has declared a religious war in which the destruction of Israel is seen as but the first step in establishing a Muslim caliphate.

It is said that Hamas will have to change because most Palestinians want peace. Would that that were so. In one poll, Hamas's hate-filled platform is supported by 68 percent of Palestinians, with 56 percent in favor of continued suicide bombings of Israeli citizens.

Buying time. This wider jihad against the West will either gather momentum and succeed or be confronted and defeated. America must not follow the European way of "walking softly and carrying a big carrot." We must not be fooled by Hamas's Mr. Nice Guy campaign: Its purpose is simply to buy time to consolidate power.

Washington made a grave error in rejecting Israeli and Fatah warnings about Hamas's participation in the election. But the democratic legitimacy of Hamas does not whitewash the moral illegitimacy of its terrorism. A one-time vote by people acculturated to an ideology of violence, intolerance, and hatred does not make them a force for peace and stability. Hamas and all who support it must accept the consequences of their position--a cessation of aid from the West they want to attack. The clear message must be that terrorism will not pay. This means no more money for roads, water systems, classrooms, health clinics, and community centers. Nor must a cent go to pay administrators and security forces, especially since the latter have been turned over to Hamas by the perpetually weak Palestinian president, Mahmoud Abbas. Yes, Hamas presides over social welfare institutions and is relatively free of corruption, but as the New Republic put it: "Are they to be admired because they will murder but will not steal?"

Any humanitarian assistance we might give should be limited to food, water, and medicine. We must be careful to avoid fungibility whereby aid frees money for terrorism. We do not owe this group the means to lock up the entire Palestinian population in an internal prison while it prepares to make war on western civilization.

America must be careful about "democracy." It is not just about elections. It is a system of free and independent institutions. A naive advocacy of democracy without such institutions may open the way to our worst enemies, even though a new regime may replace nasty friends. There is, after all, a difference between a benign tumor and a malignant cancer. At this delicate moment, our policies must not pave the way for totalitarian enemies to replace authoritarian friends.

Fixing the Potholes

Newsweek International

By Kevin Peraino

3/20

Poor Muayyad Shraim. Ten months ago the 37-year-old physical education teacher was one of Hamas's rising stars. After the Islamist group swept local elections in the West Bank town of Qalqilya last May, he won a seat on the municipal council. But as he walks through the town's streets today, Shraim occasionally looks as if he'd rather get back to leading calisthenics than listen to all his constituents' complaints. Some blame the fundamentalists for higher electricity prices. Others gripe about a cultural festival Hamas canceled last summer. One farmer blasts the Islamists for failing to fix the town's potholes. "People expect us to do everything in one minute!" Shraim cries, more than a little exasperated.

At first glance, the reversal of fortunes in Qalqilya seems like a Western diplomat's fantasy. While most Palestinian towns rallied behind Hamas candidates in January's legislative elections, Qalqilya did just the opposite. Hamas had won all 15 municipal council seats back in May 2005. Yet in January's legislative polls, Qalqilyans gave President Mahmoud Abbas's Fatah party a decisive 53 percent of the vote, compared with 41 percent for Hamas. What accounts for the plunge? Unrealistic expectations are partly to blame. Quickly improving the quality of life in the ravaged Palestinian territories would be an impossible task for any political party. But the perception of malaise is always a political killer. Says Mohammad Adnan, a 30-year-old salesman: "The message of the street to Hamas was: if you don't deliver, this is what you get."

Could Hamas's implosion in Qalqilya be a preview of things to come elsewhere in the Palestinian territories? Some Western policymakers certainly seem to hope so. Israeli and American officials have said they hope to use economic leverage to strong-arm (or, some say, topple) the new Hamas-led government. One Western diplomat told NEWSWEEK flatly that he thought it would be a "big mistake"

for Fatah to join a Hamas-dominated cabinet. He may be getting his wish. In the first session of the new Palestinian Parliament last week, Fatah legislators stormed out as the Hamas majority moved to strip Abbas of some of his presidential powers a development that is likely to make Western donors even more skittish.

Qalqilya's deputy mayor, Hashem el-Masri, also from Hamas, insists the town is doing just fine, even without foreign aid. "We tell America: we don't need your money!" el-Masri says. He claims that Qalqilya has never depended on foreign dollars to raise the more than \$30 million it takes to run the municipality each year. But according to other town officials, the economic pressures are already having an effect. A public-works engineer at the municipality told NEWSWEEK that reconstruction projects have dried up since Hamas took power last spring. She says one particularly promising project from a German organization a \$500,000 pledge to improve roads and sewage systems never materialized after the Hamas victory. "Before, we had a wave of projects," she said. "Now I work one hour a day. There's no movement, no action."

Yet even among Hamas's many critics, there seems to be a limit as to how much blame they're willing to heap on the radicals. "It's America and Israel that are putting Hamas in the corner," said one Qalqilya farmer as he relaxed near his cauliflower patch. In the future, he insisted, "we won't blame Hamas." Chiding Israel and the United States for local woes is already a favorite pastime in the Palestinian territories. At the Qalqilya zoo recently, one worker even blamed Israel for the sexual frustration of the zoo's lions; the Israelis wouldn't allow them to bring in a lioness, he claimed.

For his part, Muayyad Shraim already holds Israel responsible for sabotaging Hamas before the legislative elections earlier this year. And he knows just which buttons to push if he wants to put Western officials on edge. "If the Palestinian Authority collapses," he says, "there will be anarchy and chaos everywhere." Shraim's unspoken warning: if America and Israel want Qalqilya's problems, they can have them. He could always go back to teaching dodgeball.

PA Confidential

New Republic
By Efraim Halevy
3/20

The author served for four and a half years as the head of Mossad, Israel's intelligence service. As a thought experiment, he placed himself inside the mind of a Palestinian spymaster to provide a cold assessment of the challenges faced by the new Hamas-led government. The following is a memo to Ismail Haniyeh, the Palestinian prime minister.

Mr. Prime Minister:

Your rise to power has been meteoric and unprecedented. Less than 20 years after Sheik Ahmed Yassin founded Hamas--and after six years of bloody confrontation with the Israelis, during which many promising leaders perished in action--Hamas has scored a brilliant political triumph. You are now the leader of the Palestinian people, and I am obliged to provide you with an assessment of your prospects.

Let's begin with the international scene and some of the best news. The immediate steps taken by the Israelis and Americans to isolate Hamas have backfired. President Vladimir Putin of Russia invited your representatives to his capital--and that's before your government met any of the conditions imposed by the Quartet (the United States, Russia, the European Union, and the United Nations). The attempt to cast us as pariahs is disintegrating. We have already received expressions of support from key countries in the region, notably Iran. And even states like Turkey, Egypt, and Jordan, which have reservations about your victory, have gingerly accepted the election results. (Of course, we would wish for a more enthusiastic reception from the Saudis.) Somewhat more surprisingly, the Europeans and even the Americans have evinced great pragmatism in their dealings with us, allowing us the funds needed to sustain the lives of our citizenry. All in all, Hamas has topped 19 years of struggle with internal victory and a string of notable diplomatic successes within the space of a very few weeks.

But, in my capacity as intelligence chief, I am duty-bound to identify the threats to the Palestinian cause and to your leadership. Indeed, just as the prospects have never been so good, the threats have

never been greater--they are, to be blunt, existential.

You must now define your basic aims and policies, both internally and externally. How will you govern? Who will you bring into the fold? And who will you leave out in the cold? Every option has a price tag, as you know. If you wish to forge an alliance with Fatah, you will have to give it a much larger piece of the pie. And, if you alienate the outgoing leadership, you must expect that it will not accept its political demise gracefully. This brings me to a far larger concern: the armed groups--Fatah's Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine--in our midst. Since you are now the government, you must determine their fate. I don't believe that you can disarm them. That is, I assume that you will not wish to initiate a fitna, a bloody showdown with our Palestinian brethren. But you will still have to find a method of disciplining these groups. You will not wish to allow any further descent into anarchy, the very lawlessness that the Palestinian people sought to reject by voting you into office. And, needless to say, the Israelis would view such chaos as a pretext for moving into Palestine once again.

Then we arrive at the question of corruption. More than any other issue, the promise of clean government propelled you into office. I recommend that you punish at least a few representative figures from the previous Fatah regime, perhaps more. For obvious reasons, I do not wish to mention names. You know them all. And I'm sure that I don't need to emphasize this point, but the high expectations of the population will prove exceptionally difficult to manage. They don't just expect you to herald an era free of graft and malfeasance, but also to improve quality of life, maintain internal cohesion, and provide a modicum of domestic tranquility. Women, in particular, expect an enlightened era in which the government squares the spirit of Islam with recognition of some attributes of modernity. You will find that Palestinian women are more assertive than ever.

I've already described some good news on the international front. But our foreign relations will require their own delicacy. Your success requires the support of the current regimes in Jordan and Egypt, where the sister movements of the Muslim Brotherhood are gaining encouragement from your political triumph. If the leaders in Cairo and Amman feel that your policies undermine their interests, they will not hesitate to act against you or to leave you twisting in the wind. I must remind you that, at the height of the intifada, in March and April 2002, President Yasir Arafat appealed to Cairo and Amman to suspend diplomatic relations with Israel, which was then driving into every West Bank hamlet sowing death and destruction. Both capitals frostily turned Arafat down because their strategic relationship with Israel transcended their solidarity with Palestine. Even Damascus and Tehran (yes, Tehran), didn't lift a finger for us in that desperate hour. If Bashar Assad and Ayatollah Khomeini had ordered the firing of Hezbollah rockets in Lebanon, they could have knocked the Israelis seriously off balance. But all we received from these supposedly radical capitals were hot words and stunning operational silence. I would advise we realistically estimate the support that we might obtain in the region--particularly if we maintain Hamas's guiding principles and policies.

Let me add another caveat about the surprisingly warm reception the new government has received abroad. That is, the Russians and Turks have hardly embraced you for the purest of motives. If I read their statements correctly, they believe that they can domesticate and defang Hamas with their kindness. They may also be driven by a more ephemeral goal: to help promote their own relationship with Tehran. At the same time that your colleague Khaled Mashal and his group visited Moscow, the Russians were engaged in a last-minute effort to strike a deal with the Iranians to curtail their nuclear program. Let me say, if the Russian negotiations with Iran fail, you will find Moscow backing the American position and not the Iranian one. This is a very fundamental Russian instinct that all players in the region have learned in the 15 years since the Soviet Union's fall. Please do not base any of your strategy solely on reports you might receive from brother Mashal.

The United States, Mr. Prime Minister, has encountered its share of recent difficulties in the Middle East. Its interests in the region are many and complex. They are great friends and allies of Israel, but, on occasion, they have been known to come down very hard on Israeli governments, including that of Ariel Sharon. However, we must understand that the Americans have decided that the destiny of the entire Western world hinges on major changes in the Middle East, including regime change. They have committed their forces to battle in Afghanistan and in Iraq, and they will do this wherever the necessity arises. They will not quit halfway, because they believe the fate of their civilization depends on defeating so-called "international Islamic terrorism." They will therefore move to crush any obstacle in their path. The United States is well-aware that you are the first national faction of the Muslim Brotherhood in the entire region to reach power. You are a precedent, a first example, and, if you play it wrong--if you act in a way that seriously jeopardizes the allies of Washington--the United States will

permit you to go down to a resounding armed and political defeat. Just as you are the first victor, you are the most vulnerable. And, at the end of the day, you will find the whole of Europe, Russia, Japan, India, Pakistan, the United Nations, and--believe me, Mr. Prime Minister--Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan confronting you.

Now, Mr. Prime Minister, I'm obliged to turn to a discussion of our enemy. As your intelligence officer, I must give you an honest assessment of the Israelis, however unpleasant some of it might be. In my initial description of events, I highlighted Hamas's achievements during the last 20-odd years. The Israelis have also not done too badly, despite their withdrawal from Gaza and locales in the northern West Bank. They have the best-trained, best-equipped, and most experienced military machine in the Middle East. They have a thriving economy, a prosperous business and industrial community, and a vibrant culture. The million-odd Arab citizens of Israel enjoy the highest standard of living of any Arab community in the region. They support us in some ways, but they balk at the mere mention of their joining the Palestinian Authority.

I think, as you surely agree, that our resistance to occupation propelled the Israelis to realize the limits of their power. But does Sharon's policy of unilateral disengagement prove that we should continue armed struggle? You must accept that a decision to continue resistance will force you to abandon your domestic agenda. The two are incompatible. Hamas's domestic agenda necessitates a period of calm. To improve the quality of life and develop our social, economic, and political institutions, we need calm and freedom of passage inside and between the West Bank and Gaza. We need the Israelis to remove their endless roadblocks on every artery and at every key junction. Therefore, we cannot even begin to implement our plans for Palestine without Israeli cooperation and understanding.

The Israeli position on the Palestinian issue has evolved over recent years in surprising directions, some inconceivable only a short while ago. As you know from your own time in Israeli jails, the Israelis have often scorned and belittled the Palestinians. Just look at the way they have treated our president, Mahmoud Abbas, in their public pronouncements. Nor did the Israelis take Arafat's threats to drive the Jews into the sea much more seriously. They do, however, take you and the Hamas movement seriously; they look upon you as a very real threat, and they have been parsing your every statement with a fine comb to understand your intentions.

Right now, the Israelis don't know how to react to your government. It is, of course, the Israeli campaign season. Every politician has the daily opportunity to make foolish statements. And they have done us a huge favor by demanding that Hamas recognize Israel. Imagine: Israel, with all its economic and military might, in the waiting room, anxiously awaiting word that you have bestowed recognition upon them! Well, you took good rhetorical advantage of this situation by roundly retorting that you would not recognize them. But, as I have argued, a change in the Israeli mindset is coming. After their election, I believe they will realize that they do not need us to recognize them; that we need them to recognize us. They will wake up after their election and realize that they can still control every aspect of life in the Palestinian territories and that they can destroy your domestic agenda without starving the Palestinian population. If they conclude that your government's ties to the Iranians are meaningful, they will not wait for this alliance to flourish and prosper. They will see your government as the extension of President Ahmadinejad, who has openly stated his aim to destroy Israel. Once they conclude that we have teamed up with such a monumental threat to Israel, they will conclude the worst about your intentions and will move with all their power to remove Hamas from the scene. And they will receive international and regional support for this mission. You can only avoid this, I must conclude, by beginning to come to terms with Israel.

There are three other points that I hope you will keep in mind. After the Oslo accords of 1993, Israel allowed the Palestinian leaders residing in the Diaspora to assume power, leaving the local leadership to play a secondary role. In the final analysis, this did not serve us well. We must avoid repeating this mistake. The likes of Mashal, who spent his exile in Damascus, should not be catapulted into authority. Secondly, pundits and politicians have made so many pronouncements about Hamas's future plans that everybody, even important players in your government, are confused about your intentions. Please use your authority to stop this unnecessary stream of words. Finally, as your intelligence chief, I must caution you to keep your distance from Al Qaeda and their operatives and policies. If you do not do this, the Palestinians will become the outlaws of the Middle East. This will spell certain disaster for us.

So, Mr. Prime Minister, you have the destiny of the nation in your hands, and you will have to make your choice between options. It is not for me to suggest to you which option to take. So much now

depends on you, Mr. Prime Minister. The life and, God forbid, death, of the Palestinian people is now passing into your hands.

--Efraim Halevy is currently head of the Center for Strategic and Policy Studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He served as head of the Mossad from 1998 to 2002, and he was national security adviser to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon in 2002-2003. His book, *Man in the Shadows, Inside the Middle East Crisis with a Man Who Led the Mossad* will be published in April 2006.

AFGHANISTAN

A Fragile Corner of Order

Economist

No author given

3/18

Excellent roads, lined with elegant pine-trees, make Herat an unusual Afghan city. So does the smart business park by the airport, its factories making chemicals, paint and tasty biscuits.

This prosperity, many Heratis say, is the legacy of a former warlord-ruler of Afghanistan's western capital, Ismael Khan, who was winkled from power 18 months ago, and is now a minister in Kabul. Mr Khan, aided by his sponsors in nearby Iran, invested millions of dollars of customs revenues in the city. Alas, the government couldn't help noting that this cash was the main—indeed, almost the only—revenue stream for the entire country. As another reason to shift the white-bearded "Emir", many cited his repressive rule. Very well, Heratis replied, but could the government maintain the order to which they were accustomed?

Mr Khan's successor as governor resigned within a year, in part due to discontent over loss of services which, shorn of customs-revenues, the city could no longer afford. Last month, his replacement, Sayed Hussein Anwari, of the Shia Hazara minority, offered to resign after sectarian rioting left 8 dead and 200 injured. The riot was sparked by a rumour that Sunni banners had been desecrated by Shia youths near the city's shimmering Blue Mosque. It was quickly attended by 300 armed Sunnis astride motorbikes, flourishing banners. They led a mob of several thousand to torch three Shia mosques and a market.

Followers of Mr Khan, a Sunni Tajik, are said to have stirred the violence. Fomenting chaos to discredit a rival is a favourite trick in Afghan politics; after Mr Khan was sacked, his supporters burned down UN offices. But again, Heratis ask, if Mr Khan was to blame, can the government control him?

Perhaps not: Afghanistan's new army has made strides in the past year, but its few decent battalions are fighting the Taliban in southern Afghanistan. As for the few score Italian and Spanish peacekeepers in Herat, they are among the most timorous members of a too-feeble NATO force—though the recent deployment of Canadian and British troops to southern Afghanistan promises improvement there. More worrying, the violence was more ethnic than sectarian: it was aimed not at the city's Shia Persians, a well-established community, but at a poor horde of Shia Hazaras, most of whom arrived recently from refugee camps in Iran. During the riot, Sunni bikers chanted: "Death to Hazaras!"

This was perhaps a response to their new strength. Traditionally scorned, and massacred by the Taliban, the Hazaras were well-organised during two recent elections, winning unprecedented power for their champions. Yet the violence had worrying echoes of the ethnic slaughter that was a feature of Afghanistan's long civil war, and has been perhaps surprisingly absent from the country's current precarious politics. To ease tensions in Herat, the government has appointed a commission to investigate the riots. It is headed by Mr Khan.

SAUDI ARABIA

Coming Back to School

Time

By Jeff Chu

When Talal Al-Dehaim's friends learned last summer that he was leaving Saudi Arabia to go to college in the U.S., they told him it might not be a good idea. Attending an American school had been almost a rite of passage for ambitious Saudis, but after the 9/11 attacks and the discovery that 15 of the 19 hijackers were from the desert kingdom, many Saudi students, as well as those from other Arab and Muslim countries, rushed home fearful of repercussions. Few filled their places. As he made the long journey from Riyadh to Marshall University in Huntington, W.Va., al-Dehaim, 18, admitted he was still "nervous that American people would get nervous about Saudi people."

The U.S. and Saudi governments worried about that too, and last year they agreed that one of the best ways to dispel the apprehensions on both sides would be to foster more person-to-person contact. So over the next four years, Saudi Arabia will pay for al-Dehaim and as many as 20,000 other young Saudis to come to the U.S. to study. The U.S. has pledged to speed visa processing for the students--while still running full background checks and in-person interviews at the consulate in Jidda.

For the Saudi rulers, the scholarships are a way to revive the tradition of educating their brightest in the U.S., where more than three-quarters of current Cabinet ministers studied. For the Bush Administration, they are a way to fight for Muslim hearts and minds on home soil. "The single most successful thing we can do is bring people here and let them see America for themselves," says Karen Hughes, the Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy. "That helps them understand us in a way that they didn't before."

The program has already brought more than 6,600 Saudis to campuses in nearly every state--including one in Nevada, previously off limits to scholarship recipients because, says a Saudi embassy spokesman, "the chances of focusing on studying there seemed small"--boosting the number of Saudi students in the U.S. above pre-9/11 levels. Marshall, West Virginia's second largest university, now has more than 30 Saudis--nearly four times as many as last year--making them the fourth largest foreign contingent in a student body of 16,000.

The welcome has been warm--"Everyone is so friendly," al-Dehaim says--but Marshall's Saudis marvel at their American schoolmates' near total lack of knowledge about their country. "My neighbor, he asked, 'Are you riding camels at home?' Someone said, 'Did you bring your own oil with you?'" says Ahoud Alqahtani, 20, one of the few Saudi women at Marshall. "We don't know a lot about their country," admits Justin Carpenter, 21, a student senator. "But I bet we're not as different as we thought we were."

The Saudi students acknowledge some lingering wariness. They worry when news like the debate over the Dubai Ports deal or the attack earlier this month by a Muslim student from Iran who, claiming it was "the will of Allah," drove into a crowd at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill could turn campus opinion against them. "When they see the TV news, maybe they won't like Muslims, Saudis," says Hamad Almusai, 22. "But they don't know us." Still, any discomfort seems to dissipate as the students engage in that quintessential college activity: just hanging out.

Almusai's roommate, Neil Ball, 21, a junior from Logan County, W.Va., who has an Appalachian drawl, says their biggest problem has not been current events or differing tastes in wall d'cor--Ball put up a seductive poster of Jessica Simpson, Almusai a portrait of King Abdullah--but "probably my accent." Kenny Ison, 20, a culinary-arts major from Point Pleasant, W.Va., happily recalls how his roommate, Hatim al-Garzaie, 21, invited him to sit on a rug spread on the floor and dine with a bunch of Saudi students by digging into communal pans of rice and meat. Other nights there have been jam sessions; al-Garzaie turns off his PlayStation, plugs his oud into the amp and leads his fellow Saudis in songs from home. "Already," says Ison, "I've learned so much that I never thought I would, even at college."

As for al-Dehaim, some friends back home now ask whether they should study in the U.S. too. "It's a lot of work," he tells them. "But it's cool."

For first-person accounts from Saudi students at Marshall, go to time.com/students

MIDDLE EAST ECONOMICS

Down in the Dunes

Economist

No author given

3/18

No one has jumped out of a window, yet. But that may only be because windows have yet to be installed in the dozens of skyscrapers sprouting in the Arab Gulf, home to 22 of the world's 50 tallest buildings under construction, 16 of those in Dubai alone. Share prices are a less visible—but equally good—index of a regional boom built on high oil prices. In the past five years, they have been heading the same way as the skyscrapers, rising ninefold. But now they are pointing in the opposite direction.

What started last month as a correction of inflated equity prices is looking more and more like an outright crash. Since the start of the year, Gulf stockmarkets have shed one-quarter of their value. The worst hit, the Dubai Financial Market, is down by half from last year's high. And the bearish mood has spilled beyond the Gulf to Egypt, Jordan and Tunisia. Combined losses in Arab equity markets so far amount to some \$250 billion, not much less than last year's bumper revenues from oil exports. This week, as markets suffered record daily tumbles, some exchanges briefly halted trading amid panicked calls for government intervention.

The crunch was long predicted. Price-earnings (p/e) ratios zoomed last year to celestial heights on some exchanges. The Saudi Arabian market's p/e ratio, for example, had reached more than triple the emerging-market average of around 13 before the fall began at the end of February. So hot was the market that an estimated 3m people, perhaps half the kingdom's adult citizenry, had leapt in. Their interest was sparked not merely by a liquidity surge generated by windfall oil revenues, but also by liberalising economic policies, strong corporate performances, a gush of public share offerings and a general wariness of investing abroad in what is perceived to be a potentially hostile West.

Some have warned that since small investors are the most likely to be hurt by the crash, Islamic radicals may exploit their anger in order to discredit free-market policies. Others fear that the stock slide could create a general downward economic spiral, especially in countries such as Egypt that are less insulated by oil markets.

Severe though the correction is, for the most part markets have fallen only to where they were at the end of last year. So shares may yet have further to drop—even though the Saudi market rose on March 15th after words of support from Prince al-Waleed bin Talal, a rich investor. But it also means investors who were in for the long haul have still done pretty well.
