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IRAN

The Cackle Heard in Tehran

National Review

By Rich Lowry

4/25

The cackling oil executives have returned. They are the guys who sit around corporate boardrooms and decide how high the price of gas will be at the pump, rubbing their hands greedily and emitting squeals of Mephistophelean laughter all the while. These executives exist only in the imaginations of economic demagogues, but that doesn't make them seem any less real to Americans who are gripped by petroleum paranoia every time they don't like the price of gasoline.

How powerful and resourceful must be the cackling executives? Boundlessly. Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad might strike most observers as deeply irrational, unworried about possibly prompting a nuclear exchange one day in the Middle East. But this interpretation misses the true measure of the man. Oil executives apparently have his ear: Why else would he do them such a huge favor by driving up world crude prices with his nuclear crisis?

Once you're clued in to the alleged power of the cackling executives, their influence extends everywhere. With al Qaeda--its threat against Saudi Arabia keeps the world market good and jittery. With rebels in Nigeria--who maintain they are fighting for the rights of the Ijaw tribe in the Niger delta, but whose guerrilla war conveniently disrupts Nigerian oil production. With Chad--the corruptly governed African nation that is threatening to cut off its production in a dispute with the World Bank.

This is all on the supply side of the price equation, but world demand matters, too. Chinese Premier Deng Xiaoping must have been just as concerned about Texaco's profits as the economic well-being of his country-men when he launched China's market revolution 30 years ago. The resulting economic growth means that the country is slurping up ever-more oil--and driving up world prices, in a benefit to you-know-who.

Surveying all the forces in world politics and economics that play into higher prices at the pump, it puts retiring Exxon-Mobil CEO Lee Raymond's otherwise outlandish \$400-million retirement package in perspective. Isn't that only fair compensation for devious international chicanery that surely required deft management skills and occasionally working in the office on weekends?

Then there's the cackling executives' most inspired manipulation of all--the change of seasons. Without winter turning to summer, there would be no need to make the shift-over in seasonal blends of gasoline, with the inevitable pinch in supply that comes with it. Cato Institute energy analyst Jerry Taylor points out that there is a price-gouging debate every spring when refineries make this switch and prices bump up. This year the disruption has been compounded by refineries switching from using the environmentally suspect methyl tertiary-butyl ether as an additive in gasoline to using ethanol, which is hard to transport from the Midwest to the coasts. The story of how the cackling executives managed this one is too complicated to relate, let alone their secret alliance with environmentalists to limit domestic supply and thus prop up prices further.

Of course, there is a less seductively simple explanation of rising gas prices than that a handful of oil executives have planned it. In a world market, prices will go up and go down, and the forces that play into those trends are large, complicated and mostly uncontrollable. The foolish conceit of our politics is that the oil market works only when prices go down. When the prices go up, it's a scandal. So Speaker of the House Dennis Hastert and Majority Leader Bill Frist--showing either a dismaying attraction to the moronic or a desire to pretend to have such an attraction--have called on President Bush to investigate price gouging by the oil companies.

Maybe such an investigation will unravel a vast conspiracy of cackling executives, and the Federal Trade Commission will have to raid those corporate boardrooms to restore world crude-oil prices to their natural, low equilibrium. Such, at least, is the fevered dream of the petroleum paranoiacs.

--Rich Lowry is author of *Legacy: Paying the Price for the Clinton Years*.

Dealing with Iran

National Review

By Kathryn Jean Lopez

4/25

Eternal Iran: Continuity and Chaos is the title of a recent academic contribution from Patrick Clawson and Michael Rubin. NRO Editor Kathryn Lopez took its existence as an excuse to check in with Rubin about what's going on in Iran and what historical perspective we should keep in mind in the coming months.

Kathryn Jean Lopez: What's so eternal about Iran? Does "Eternal Iran" mean we can't win?

Michael Rubin: Iran's history goes back millennia. It is important to recognize the historical patterns that shape Iranian state and society. We wanted to correct the faulty notion that the Islamic Republic is the natural state of things. Too many books written by academics in the year or two after the Islamic Revolution assumed that the Islamic Revolution represented the natural evolution of Iranian politics. It is now clear that the Revolution was an aberration. This raises the policy question: Should we do anything that helps prolong the system, or will we side with the vast majority of Iranians who hope for change? We can only win if the Iranian people win. And that means not striking any deal which will help preserve the status quo and a theocracy anathema not only to many Iranians, but also to so many religious Shiites.

Lopez: What's the continuity and what's the chaos? Okay, maybe we've got the chaos part on our TV screens and headlines. What's the continuity then?

Rubin: There is so much that transcends Iranian history. Many Americans think of religious extremism when they imagine Iran. Iranians are religious, but far more important is culture. Iranian still celebrate pre-Islamic holidays and their national epic, the Shahnameh, tells the story of ancient kings far into the pre-Islamic past. The Islamic Republic may like to paint Iran as Shiite first and Iranian second, but ordinary Iranians will have none of that. Pride and nationalism are also important themes that permeate Iranian culture. In more recent centuries, there has been a running battle between the central government and the periphery. Whenever the central government is weak, regional groups exert themselves. That is why the recent violence in Baluchistan and Khuzistan is so interesting. There is also constant tension between outreach and xenophobia. And, unfortunately, among the clerical elite, there are persistent negative trends like rabid anti-Semitism. Few people realize that the yellow star which Jews had to wear in Nazi Germany had precedent in medieval Iran. This does not mean that most Iranians are intolerant; quite the opposite. But whether among the Zoroastrian magi of ancient Iran, or the Shiites today, tolerance does not always permeate clerical circles.

Lopez: The president of Iran seems to really want to get rid of Israel. Will he try? Can he?

Rubin: The presidency in Iran doesn't have much power; it's a sideshow. It is the Supreme Leader that counts. Still, Ahmadinejad may reflect the thinking of the Supreme Leader. It is dangerous to assume that the Iranian leadership does not mean what it says. First of all, this regime is about ideology. We should not mirror image our own value system and thought patterns onto proponents of a theocratic system. To understand the regime, it's important to understand the roots and development of its ideology. Second, the same analysts who dismiss Iranian threats now also discounted Iraqi threats to Kuwait back in early 1990. Our failure to understand that sometimes dictators mean what they say ultimately led to Operation Desert Storm.

Lopez: Are they a real threat to U.S.?

Rubin: Yes. There is a tendency among American policymakers and pundits to self-flagellate. If something bad happens anywhere in the world, it must somehow be our fault. But, a successful, free, liberal society poses a threat to a lot of less successful, less free ideologies. At the same time, it is useful to have a bogey. Traditionally, Iranians have woven conspiracies about Great Britain; now, it is the United States.

The real threat isn't that Iran will drop a nuclear weapon on Washington, but rather that with a nuclear deterrent, its leadership will become so overconfident that it will lash out with conventional terrorism.

Lopez: You know Iran. Every time I say anything about supporting the Iranian people, the overwhelming response I get is "you're kidding yourself if you think they will welcome us and our help." Who is right? Do the Iranian people want our help? And if we help them, will they be our new Persian ally? What if we get something worse?

Rubin: Iranians are nationalistic. They don't want us to dictate to them. But we shouldn't be so condescending. Iranians are big boys and girls and can determine for themselves what is best. We should offer our help and let Iranian civil society determine whether or not they want it, and then judge them on their effectiveness. We certainly should stand up for dissidents. They have already put themselves on the line, but it helps that they know they are not just twisting in the regime. Here the New York Times does itself a disservice. It constantly conflates reformists with democrats or freedom-seekers. They are not. Reformists are part and parcel of the regime and do not speak for the democrats. More broadly, freedom is a very powerful force. Only after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union did we learn how much we had underestimated the importance of moral clarity to Soviet dissidents. In the future after the regime falls, will Iran be an ally? Iran will go its own way, as they should. Like France, they may be a thorn in our side. But, better a diplomatic thorn than a nuclear theocracy. I doubt we will get anything worse. Iranians are quite cosmopolitan and they have a history of constitutional government. Indeed, they are in the centenary anniversary of their original constitutional revolution.

Lopez: Why do folks like you and Mike Ledeen wind up reporting things no one else seems to report--for years now? Are you making it up or is this an Eason Jordan kinda situation--the big-media guys are not reporting the truth because they're afraid to?

Rubin: It never hurts to read Iranian newspapers or speak Persian. I always spend a lot of time on what is going on in the provinces, not only Tehran. I had spent a good deal of time in the Islamic Republic--was there during the 1999 student protests--and met a whole host of people. It is impossible to get a feel for a place unless you're willing to spend time there. And getting a sense for the place is important in analysis.

A bit of clarification, though. At the American Enterprise Institute, we all work independently. I don't know what Michael Ledeen, Reuel Gerecht, or anyone else is doing, nor them me. We sort of operate as a university, without all the petty departmental squabbles. We sometimes agree, and often disagree. It can lead to some pretty interesting exchanges, but policy analysis is about debate.

But you do put your finger on a big problem: Self-censorship. There is a real problem not only among journalists, but also among academics. After Tom Friedman wrote critical columns about Iran a couple years ago, the regime banned visas to other New York Times reporters for about ten months. The New York Times is willing to make compromises they shouldn't. They are willing to accept uncritically Iranian government statistics. Iranian-studies professors have to do original research to receive tenure. This means accessing archives. The Iranian government is notorious about denying visas on political grounds. It's like the foreign-policy equivalent of the Soup Nazi on Seinfeld. If Tehran doesn't like your politics or papers, "no visa for you!" This is compounded by the fact that many Middle Eastern-studies professors feel they need to advocate for their country of study, when they should be neutral analysts. They transform themselves into amplifiers of Iranian rhetoric. It is dishonest and unscholarly, and a main reason why so much debate has shifted out of universities and into the think tanks which approach issues more openly and honestly, are more willing to confront taboo, and less willing to self-censor or sacrifice arguments upon the altar of political correctness.

Lopez: Are we going to bomb Iran before the November elections?

Rubin: Only the president knows. He will act if he feels it is the only way to prevent Iran from gaining nuclear weapons. Part of the problem is Iran's overconfidence. They don't think we can act. Bill Clinton faced the same skepticism as he approached the 1998 elections with a challenge looming from Iraq. Presidents--especially second-term ones--make decisions based on national interest, not cynical political calculation.

Lopez: If we get involved in Iran, where does it stop? Is Syria next? You're at AEI, neocon Zionist conspiracy central, so you must have the full war plan, right?

Rubin: I don't have the full war plan; I've been too busy out clubbing baby harp seals. When I was in Iceland last month, some protesters brought suit against me as a war criminal for advocating for an

illegal policy. Maybe they thought I did have a plan, but I suspect it was more the matter of self-described progressives trying to criminalize debate. And actually, I'm not just at AEI, neocon, Zionist conspiracy central, but I was also Quaker-educated for 14 years and spent one summer interning for a Democrat on Capitol Hill funded by a Congressional Black Caucus Foundation summer fellowship. Let Mother Jones go nuts with that wire diagram.

Seriously, Washington is a pretty inward-looking place which is unfortunate. There is no master plan or plot. We react to crises as they occur. Indeed, my criticism of the Bush administration is that they are too reactive, and not proactive enough.

Lopez: What's a fact about Iranian history you'd like everyone considering current circumstances to know?

Rubin: People often bring up the U.S.-supported coup against Prime Minister Muhammad Musaddiq in 1953 as a watershed moment. It was. It was, unfortunately, a triumph of realism. But while Musaddiq was no saint--his populism and willingness to use mob violence parallel the strategy of Jean-Bertrand Aristide in Haiti--we are paying the price for swimming against the tide of much of the Iranian public. This is why it would be such a mistake to make the same mistake again by holding out an olive branch to the current regime, which is as unpopular now as was the shah in 1953 and 1979.

Lopez: What's something about the Iranian people we should all know?

Rubin: It sounds basic, but Iranians aren't Arabs. While Arabic is a Semitic language like Hebrew, Persian is Indo-European. There are so many Persian cognates: The Persian word for forest is jungle and the word for sugar cube is qand (like candy). Mother is madar, father is padar, and brother, baradar. It is important to know and understand Iranian culture. Iranian poetry is rich, and Iranian cuisine the best in the world. Still, while appreciating Iranian culture is important to derive a more nuanced policy, it is also important to not lose perspective: It is true that 80 percent of Iranians don't support their government and are pro-Western. But it's equally important to remember that how friendly and independent Iranians are doesn't matter; it's the guys with the guns who make the decision and who have for a quarter century isolated Iran.

Lopez: Is there anything Ahmadinejad could ever say that would surprise you?

Rubin: Yes. "We will listen to our people. We will be accountable for our actions. We want to live in peace within our own borders. We will not sponsor terrorism." But, unfortunately in this case, I don't anticipate any surprises.

A Financial Hit on Iran?

Time

By Elaine Shannon

5/1

Ahead of this week's U.N. Security Council deadline for Iran to abandon its nuclear activities and an expected report from nuclear watchdog Mohamed ElBaradei, U.S. officials have been mapping a plan to hit the defiant regime. But the attacks will be financial, not military. The U.S. and its European allies will ask the council next month for a resolution that would pave the way for political and economic sanctions. If, as expected, Russia and China threaten a veto or stall, the U.S. intends to work outside the U.N. to isolate Tehran "diplomatically and economically," Under Secretary of State Nicholas Burns said last week. "Countries that trade with Iran ... ought to begin to rethink those commercial trade relationships."

Among the plan's first targets: Iran's accounts and financial institutions in Europe. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice met last week with the finance ministers of Britain and Germany, where, according to a U.S. Treasury study, Iranian-government banks operate branches to handle funds generated by the oil trade. The U.S. wants non-Iranian banks to stop facilitating Tehran's money flow. A senior official involved in devising the strategy told TIME, "It's about convincing financial institutions not to deal with bad guys, because they're worried about their own reputations."

Iran has shifted some accounts from Europe to Persian Gulf countries in anticipation of a squeeze. So Under Secretary of State Robert Joseph traveled to seven countries in the Middle East earlier this month to talk with officials about "what we can do together to disrupt the proliferation activities," he said. Financial restrictions "can have an effect on Iran's ability to acquire more technology and expertise from the outside."

Another possible move is a disinvestment campaign similar to that used against apartheid-era South Africa. A study by the Conflict Securities Advisory Group, a Washington consultant hired by the State Department, found that 124 publicly traded European companies have ties to Iran and that European banks are financing significant energy and telecom projects there. A disinvestment campaign could be tough to pull off. But U.S. officials hope that while conscience may not get those firms to quit Iran, the threat of bad p.r. might.

The U.S. battle plan would call for financial, not military, attacks on Iran.

Three Reasons Not to Bomb Iran—Yet

Commentary

By Edward N. Luttwak

5/2006

I know of no reputable expert in the United States or in Europe who trusts the constantly repeated promise of Iran's rulers that their nuclear program will be entirely peaceful and is meant only to produce electricity. The question is what to do about this. Faced with the alarming prospect of an Iran armed with nuclear weapons, some policy experts favor immediate preventive action, while others, of equal standing, invite us to accept what they consider to be inevitable in any case. The former call for the bombing of Iran's nuclear installations before they can produce actual weapons. The latter, to the contrary, urge a diplomatic understanding with Iran's rulers in order to attain a stable relationship of mutual deterrence.

Neither position seems adequately to recognize essential Iranian realities or American strategic priorities. To treat Iran as nothing more than a set of possible bombing targets cannot possibly be the right approach. Still more questionable is the illogical belief that a regime that feels free to attack American interests in spite of its present military inferiority would somehow become more restrained if it could rely on the protective shield of nuclear weapons.

In contemplating preventive action, the technical issue may be quickly disposed of. Some observers, noting that Iran's nuclear installations consist of hundreds of buildings at several different sites, including a number that are recessed in the ground with fortified roofs, have contended that even a prolonged air campaign might not succeed in destroying all of them. Others, drawing a simplistic analogy with Israel's aerial destruction of Iraq's Osiraq nuclear reactor in June 1981, speak as if it would be enough to drop sixteen unguided bombs on a single building to do the job. The fact is that the targets would not be buildings as such but rather processes, and, given the aiming information now available, they could indeed be interrupted in lasting ways by a single night of bombing. An air attack is not a demolition contract, and in this case it could succeed while inflicting relatively little physical damage and no offsite casualties, barring gross mechanical errors that occur only rarely in these days of routine precision.

The greater question, however, is neither military nor diplomatic but rather political and strategic: what, in the end, do we wish to see emerge in Iran? It is in light of that long-term consideration that we need to weigh both our actions and their timing, lest we hinder rather than accelerate the emergence of the future we hope for. We must start by considering the special character of American relations with the country and people of Iran.

The last time the United States seriously considered the use of force in Iran, much larger operations were envisaged than the bombing of a few uranium-enrichment installations. The year was 1978, and the mission was so demanding that a complete light-infantry division would have been needed just as an advance guard to screen the build-up of the main forces. The projected total number of troops in action—most of them from Iran's U.S.-equipped and U.S.-trained army—would easily have exceeded the maximum total fielded by the United States and its allies in Iraq since 2003. Their mission: to defend the country from a Soviet thrust to the Persian Gulf, in which motor-rifle divisions would

descend from the Armenian and Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republics to link up with airborne divisions sent ahead to seize the oil ports.

That long-ago bit of contingency planning reflected sound intelligence on the contemporary transformation of the Soviet army from a ponderous battering ram to a fast-paced maneuver force. In the end, to be sure, it turned out that not Iran but neighboring Afghanistan was the Soviet target. But there is no question that, in facing the adventurism of an exceedingly well-armed Soviet Union in its final stage of militarist decline, the government of Iran could rely on the protection of its American alliance, an alliance in place ever since the Truman administration blocked Stalin's attempt to partition the country in 1946. From then on, and even in the perilous circumstances envisaged in 1978, the United States stood ready to risk the lives of American troops to defend Iran—it was that important in American strategy.

At stake in those decades was not just Iran's oil, although that counted for much more in 1946 than it does now: there was as yet no oil production to speak of in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, or the United Arab Emirates, and Iraq was the only other oil exporter in the region. More significant than Iran's geology was, and is, its geography. During the cold war, its northern border on either side and across the waters of the Caspian Sea formed an essential segment of the Western perimeter of containment. Today, it is Iran's very long southern coastline that is of equal strategic importance, dominating as it does the entire Persian Gulf from its narrow southern entrance at the straits of Hormuz to the thin wedge of Iraqi territory at its head. All of the offshore oil- and gas-production platforms in the gulf, all the traffic of oil and gas tankers originating from the jetties of the Arabian peninsula and Iraq, are within easy reach of the Iranian coast.

Unchanging geographic realities thus favor a strategic alliance between the United States and Iran, with large benefits for each side. Only the strategic reach of the distant United States can secure Iran from the power of the Russians nearby—a power not in abeyance even now, as the recent nuclear diplomacy shows, and much more likely to revive in the future than to decline. Likewise, a friendly Iran can best keep troublemakers away from the oil installations on the Arab side of the gulf, where there are only weak and corrupt desert dynasties to protect them.

The vehement rejection of the American alliance by the religious extremists in power ever since the fall of the Shah in 1979 therefore violates the natural order of things—damaging both sides, but Iran far more grievously. The cost to the people of Iran has been huge, starting with the 600,000 dead and the uncounted number of invalids from the 1980-88 war with Iraq, which American protection would certainly have averted, and continuing till now with the lost opportunities, disruptions, and inconveniences caused by the lack of normal diplomatic and commercial relations.

These impediments are so costly precisely because there is still so much interchange between the two sides, with Iranian-Americans traveling back and forth and not a few operating businesses in Iran while residing in the U.S., and vice-versa. Beyond that, millions of ordinary Iranians are keenly interested in all that is American, from youth fashions to democratic politics, and nothing can stop them from watching the Farsi-language television stations of Los Angeles; all attempts by Iran's rulers to prohibit the country's ubiquitous satellite antennas have failed.

That is part of a much wider loss of authority over Iranian society. The regime started off in 1979 with the immense prestige of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, initially the consensual leader of just about everyone in Iran: Westernizing liberals and traditionalist bazaar merchants, the modernizing middle classes and the urban poor, rural landlords angry at the Shah's land reforms and the peasant beneficiaries of those measures, old-line Tudeh Communists and anti-Communist radicals, and of course believing Muslims of every sort, from the moderately devout and quietist to the fanatical clerics of the more extreme theological schools.

Except for the last-named, all the members of this broad coalition of the deluded were one by one excluded from any share of power, and then variously outlawed, imprisoned, executed, oppressed, marginalized, or simply ignored, leaving extremist clerics in full control. Initially, these still had Khomeini's authority to justify their power, and still enjoyed the traditional respect that many Iran-ians used to feel for the clerics of Shiite Islam. But that is entirely gone now, replaced by resentment and contempt.

Too many clerics have used their official government positions, or their control of confiscated property placed in Islamic trusts, to enrich themselves and their families. Too many have operated scams of all

kinds, diverting oil revenues or overcharging the government not only to fund the hugely swollen theological schools whose hordes of pious idlers must be fed and clothed but also for their personal benefit. The most notorious of them all, Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, a low-ranking cleric by trade, twice president of the Islamic republic from 1989 to 1997, perennial candidate for another term, chairman of the unelected but powerful "Expediency Discernment Council," and a top adviser to the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, is widely believed to have become Iran's richest man. Under the Shah, corruption in government contracting notoriously added some 15 percent to the cost of everything that was bought, from fertilizers for the ministry of agriculture to helicopters. Now the graft is more like 30 percent; the family and cronies of the Shah, it turns out, were paragons of self-restraint as compared with the clerics. They now form an entire class of exploiters, with the result that a bitter anti-clericalism has become widespread in Iran as it never was before.

Having lost all its moral authority, the regime must survive on the power of coercion alone, derived from the brutish part-time Basij militia of poor illiterates and the full-time Pasdaran Inqilab, or "Revolutionary Guards," whose forces are structured in ground, air, and naval combat units but whose men can still be sent into action as enforcers against protesting civilians. With the rise of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the first non-cleric to win Iran's presidency and himself a former engineering officer in their ranks, the Pasdaran have become an important political faction as well as a military force, a political gendarmerie, and a business conglomerate.

It is one more symptom of the regime's degeneration that, although the Pasdaran are well paid by local standards, they complement their salaries by engaging in both legal and illegal business, from manufacturing to contraband across the Persian Gulf. The Pasdaran's naval arm operates fast patrol boats from seven Iranian ports and the Halul oil platform. They are used to smuggle in products from foreign hulls or from the port of Dubai, not only embargoed items for national purposes but also perfumes and other luxury products for private money-making.

Nor is that all. Because of its ideology, as well as the imperatives of retaining power against the popular will, the regime is in permanent collision with the culture, or rather the cultures, of Iran. Almost half of the country's population is not Persian. Yet, under an official Persian nationalism that dates back to the 1920's—it is the only aspect of the Shah's imperial regime that Ayatollah Khomeini and his successors have left entirely untouched—all other national cultures are suppressed and reduced to mere folklore. Only Persian-language teaching is allowed (except for Armenian-Christian and Jewish religious instruction), condemning all non-Persians to illiteracy in their own languages. Of these non-Persians, the Kurds alone account for some 9 percent of Iran's population, and their national sentiments have certainly been strengthened by the example of virtual Kurdish independence in Iraq next door. As their demands for cultural autonomy become more forceful, something of an insurgency seems to have started in Kurdish-inhabited parts of northwestern Iran. Smaller nationalities, too, have recently engaged in acts of violent resistance, including the Arabs at 3 percent of Iran's population and the Baluch of the southeast at 2 percent.

Taken together, the Kurds, the Arabs, the Baluch, plus several other ethnicities (Turkmen, Lurs, Gilaki, and Mazandarani), whether in any way dissident or not, amount to a quarter of Iran's population. But another quarter at least is added by the Turkish-speaking Azeris. Although many Azeris, especially in Tehran, are thoroughly assimilated, many others increasingly affirm their Turkic national identity, and groups calling for cultural autonomy or even separation have become increasingly active among them. Ever since Azerbaijan, just across the border, gained its independence from the Soviet Union, the Azeris have had a national home of their own, and it is not Iran.

Further fracturing the country's unity is the clerics' religious extremism. Their discriminatory practices arouse the resentment not only of such minor non-Islamic communities as the Bahais, Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians, who conjointly amount to less than 1 percent of the population, but also of the Sunni Muslims who account for some 10 percent. In Tehran, home to more than a million of them, Sunnis are not allowed to have their own mosque, as they have in Rome, Tel Aviv, and Washington, D.C. The last sustained attempt to build a Sunni mosque was blocked by Mahmoud Ahmadinejad when he was mayor of Tehran.

Ahmadinejad's advent as president marks, indeed, a definite shift—from the institutionalized religious extremism in place since the fall of the Shah in 1979 to a more strident ultra-extremism. True, under Iran's theocratic constitution the elected president must obey the "Supreme Leader," a cleric of at least ayatollah rank, just as the elected Majlis parliament is subordinated to the unelected "Council of Guardians." Hence the views of the previous president, the elegant, learned, and mostly moderate

Seyyed Muhammad Khatami, mattered not at all, as was soon discovered by the Western officials who wasted their time in negotiating with him. But Khatami was powerless because he was out of step with a regime that was responding to its ever increasing unpopularity by becoming ever more extreme. Ahmadinejad, by contrast, exemplifies that very trend.

Although the world now knows him for his persistent denial of the Holocaust and his rants against Israel and Zionism, at home Ahmadinejad's hostility is directed not against Iran's dwindling Jewish community but against the Sunnis. Lately, moreover, his ultra-extremism has antagonized even many of his fellow Shiites: he is an enthusiastic follower of both Ayatollah Muhammad Taqi Misbah Yazdi, for whom all current prohibitions are insufficient and who would impose an even stricter Islamic puritanism, and of a messianic, end-of-days cult centered on the Jamkaran mosque outside the theological capital of Qum. More traditional believers are alarmed by the hysterical supplications of the Jamkaran pilgrims for the return of Abul-Qassem Muhammad, the twelfth imam who occulted himself in the year 941 and is to return as the mahdi, or Shiite messiah. More urgently they fear that in trying to "force" the return of the mahdi, Ahmadinejad may deliberately try to provoke a catastrophic external attack on Iran that the mahdi himself would have to avert.

The shift from everyday extremism to a more active ultra-extremism is also manifest in the persecution of heterodox Shiites, both the Ahl-e-Haqq of western Iran and the far more numerous Sufi brotherhoods, who were previously left alone even by the rigorously fanatical Ayatollah Khomeini. Now, by contrast, Sufi gathering places are forcibly closed or attacked, and a major center in Qum was recently demolished, with hundreds of protesting Sufi dervishes arrested in the process.

Far more important than any of this is the antipathy of the regime for the Persian majority culture itself. Relentlessly favoring an essentially Arab Islamic culture instead, it condemns—though it has not been able to suppress—such cherished pre-Islamic customs as the fire-jumping ceremony that precedes the Nowruz celebrations of the Zoroastrian new year each spring. More generally, it elevates its narrow Islamism above the achievements and legacy of one of the world's major civilizations, whose millennial influence in everything from poetry and music to monumental architecture, from the higher crafts of carpets and miniatures to cuisine, continues to be felt in a vast area from the Balkans to Bengal right across central Asia.

The cultural dimension of their identity is especially significant for the Persians of the Iranian diaspora. This vast and growing group comprises a handful of political exiles and millions of ordinary people who could have prospered in Iran, and made Iran prosperous, but for their refusal to live under the rule of religious fanatics. Their cultural identity is what gives them a strong sense of cohesion quite independently of the Islam they were born into. While only a few have converted to Christianity, or are seriously engaged in the Zoroastrian revival that is promoted by some exiles, the majority have reacted to the extremism of Iran's present rulers by becoming, in effect, post-Islamic—that is, essentially secular but for a sentimental attachment to certain prayers and rituals. In this, the exiles are presaging the future of Iran itself.

In contemplating American military action against Iran, it is important to recall these fundamental realities—now submerged but bound to reassert themselves as fundamentals always do. For the inhabitants of Iran are human beings like the rest of us, and extremist norms can be imposed on them only by brute force. A valid analogy is with the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe and Russia and, in China, the retreat of Communism from the economic to the political realm alone. In each of these cases, even after all the depredations, massacres, destructions, and claimed transformations of decades of Communist rule, local cultures and historic identities reemerged largely intact and essentially unchanged—except for the principled rejection of Communist ideology.

It will be just the same in Iran when the fanatics who now oppress the non-fanatical majority lose power, as they inevitably will in time. Along with the reemergence of the country's suppressed Westernization that dates back to the 1920's, along with the restoration of its own beloved secular Persian culture, one can reasonably expect the United States to return to the scene as Iran's natural ally. But not everything will be as it was before, for the long and bitter years of religious oppression will have engendered widespread disaffiliation from politicized Islam, with some interest in its apolitical variants and perhaps some conversions to milder faiths, and certainly with an irresistible demand to strip the clerics of all political or judicial power.

That, as it happens, is one excellent reason not to move forthwith to bomb Iran's nuclear installations. For the long-term consequences of any American military action cannot be disregarded. Iranians are

our once and future allies. Except for a narrow segment of extremists, they do not view themselves as enemies of the United States, but rather as the exact opposite: at a time when Americans are unpopular in all other Muslim countries, most Iranians become distinctly more friendly when they learn that a visitor is American. They must not be made to feel that they were attacked by the very country they most admire, where so many of their own relatives and friends have so greatly prospered, and with which they wish to restore the best of relations.

There is a second good reason not to act precipitously. In essence, we should not bomb Iran because the worst of its leaders positively want to be bombed—and are doing their level best to bring that about.

When a once broadly popular regime is reduced to the final extremity of relying on repression alone, when its leadership degenerates all the way down from an iconic Khomeini to a scruffy Ahmadinejad, it can only benefit from being engaged or threatened by the great powers of the world. The clerics' frantic extremism reflects a sense of insecurity that is fully justified, given the bitter hostility with which they are viewed by most of the population at large. In a transparent political maneuver, Ahmadinejad tries to elicit nationalist support at home by provoking hostile reactions abroad, through his calls for the destruction of Israel, his clumsy version of Holocaust denial that is plainly an embarrassment even to other extremists, and, above all, his repeated declarations that Iran is about to repudiate the Non-Proliferation Treaty it ratified in 1970.

There is a third reason, too. The effort to build nuclear weapons started more than three decades ago, yet the regime is still years away from producing a bomb.

It was as far back as August 1974, when the overnight tripling of Iran's oil revenues seemed to offer boundless opportunities, that the Shah publicly announced his intention to fund the construction of 23 nuclear reactors with an electricity-producing capacity of 1,000 megawatts each—a huge total, enough to supply Iran's entire demand. His declared aim was to preserve the "noble" commodity of oil for the more valuable extraction of petrochemicals, instead of burning it as a furnace fuel.

That almost made economic sense at the time. Although many suspected—rightly—that the Shah's real aim was to acquire nuclear weapons (we now know that he was seeking to buy ballistic missiles as well), he did at least have a passingly plausible explanation. But that was before the immensity of Iran's natural-gas reserves became known. No such cover story can deceive anyone in 2006: with 812 trillion cubic feet of proven gas reserves (15 percent of the world's total), Iran can cheaply generate all the electricity it wants with gas turbines.

In 1975, the Shah contracted with the French for enriched uranium and with Germany's Kraftwerk Union consortium of Siemens and A.E.G. Telefunken, as well as with ThyssenKrupp, to build the first two pressurized light-water reactors and their generating units near Iran's major port city of Bushehr. Work progressed rapidly until July 1979, when, after an expenditure of some \$2.5 billion, the Germans abandoned Bushehr because Iran's new revolutionary rulers refused to make an overdue progress payment of \$450 million. It seems that Ayatollah Khomeini opposed nuclear devilry—and besides, anything done by the Shah was viewed with great suspicion.

At that point, one reactor (Bushehr I) was declared by the Germans to be 85-percent complete and the other (Bushehr II) 50-percent complete. Both were subsequently damaged during the war with Iraq that lasted until 1988, chiefly in air strikes flown by seconded French pilots. Siemens was asked to return to finish the work but, knowing that the German government would never allow the contract to proceed, refused.

Negotiations with the Russians began soon thereafter. But because of quarreling by different factions within Iran and protracted haggling with Minatom, the Soviet atomic-energy ministry, no agreement was reached until 1995, when Boris Yeltsin, by now the president of Russia, ignored American objections and approved the delivery of a VVER-1000 pressurized light-water reactor powered by slightly enriched uranium rods. Delivered as a single large module, the reactor was to be fitted into the Bushehr I building, which was to be quickly repaired, adapted, and completed by Iranian and Russian contractors.

But problems arose—more or less the same ones that might be encountered in remodeling a suburban kitchen, though on a somewhat larger scale. Today, some eleven years after the contract was signed, some 2,500 Russian technicians are still hard at work in famously hot Bushehr, and the reactor is still

not quite ready. The United States, which originally opposed the Minatom contract, now accepts, presumably for good reason, that all is proceeding properly—the Russians alone are to process the uranium rods, and the level of Minatom's competence and efficiency has been adequately signaled by the pace of its performance so far.

Rather less is known about Iran's secret program to produce weapon-grade uranium by the centrifuge process, but there is no reason to believe that things are otherwise. What is known is that in 1995, the Pakistani thief and smuggler Abdul Qadeer Khan, who is regularly described as a scientist but who has never invented or developed anything at all, agreed to sell to Iran the complete centrifuge-technology package he had stolen from the European URENCO consortium. The package also included samples of Pakistani-made centrifuges, full-scale plans for a heavy-water and plutonium reactor and separation plant, and the drawings and calculations for a cannon-type uranium bomb that Pakistan had originally received from China.

Evidently not included in the package were the two first stages of the separation process—the straightforward crushing and leaching needed to extract concentrated natural uranium or "yellowcake" from uranium ore—and the less simple but not overly sophisticated chemical plant needed to convert yellowcake into the gas uranium hexafluoride, which is fed into centrifuges. But China made up for this lack in 1996, selling complete and detailed plans and blueprints to Iran after the United States successfully objected to the sale of the plant itself. It is now installed, big as life, near Isphahan, ready for use and evidently already tested. To judge by photographs, it could just as readily be incapacitated with fewer than twelve 1,000-pound bombs, though the target would have to be revisited periodically because chemical plants are easily repaired even after their seemingly spectacular destruction.

But the core technology in the Khan package was that of the centrifuges themselves. They were not the ultra-fast, carbon-fiber units that URENCO now uses but two early models: one built out of dense aluminum that is easier to manufacture with the right machinery, and the other built out of a more efficient maraging steel but harder to manufacture. Both derive from a 1957 German design that was itself an improved version of the original aluminum centrifuges developed in the postwar Soviet Union by captured German scientists.

The fissile U-235 isotope of uranium that is needed for bombs is only 1.26-percent lighter than the mass of U-238 that comprises 99.3 percent of natural uranium. To extract it, only very fast centrifuges are of any use, turning at the rate of at least 1,500 revolutions per second, a hundred times as fast as a domestic washing machine. Things that turn that fast easily break apart, and the detailed design is also far from simple: to reduce friction that would otherwise generate enough heat to melt the whole thing, the electrically powered rotor must spin in a vacuum, with a magnetic bearing. The Japanese, who are generally believed to be somewhat more advanced than the Iranians in such matters, encountered considerable difficulties with their centrifuge plant.

Nor could Khan possibly sell enough centrifuges to Iran: to separate U-235 for a bomb in any reasonable amount of time, many centrifuges must be set to work at once. With the design now in Iran's possession, it would take at least 1,000 centrifuges working around the clock for at least a year to produce enough U-235 for a single cannon-type uranium bomb. Those 1,000 centrifuges must first be manufactured and then connected by piping into so-called "cascades"—and they must not break down, as poorly made centrifuges certainly will. (Of the 164 centrifuges that Iran already had in motion when the inspectors of the International Atomic Energy Agency [IAEA] shut down the cascade in November 2003, fully a third crashed when the electricity was turned off.) Nor is it easy to keep the cascade running correctly: because uranium hexafluoride becomes highly corrosive in contact with water vapor, it can easily perforate imperfect tubes—and any leaks will promptly damage more of the plant.

It is true that one potential obstacle to Iran's quest for U-235 did prove to be entirely insignificant. European firms, mostly German and Swiss, not only eagerly sold the high-strength aluminum, special maraging steel, electron-beam welders, balancing machines, vacuum pumps, machine tools, and highly specialized flow-forming machines for both aluminum and maraging steel centrifuges, but also trained Iranians in the use of all this equipment. Remarkably, or perhaps not, they were also willing to train Iranians in the processes specifically needed to manufacture centrifuges whose only possible purpose is to enrich uranium U-235. When the IAEA inspectors came around, they were able to read and photograph the labels on all the equipment, which neither the European manufacturers nor the Iranians had bothered to remove. It remains to be seen if any consequences will ensue.

Still, in spite of all the industrial assistance it received, it is not clear that the Iranian nuclear organization can manufacture centrifuge cascades of sufficient magnitude, efficiency, and reliability. There are many talented engineers among the Iranian exiles in the United States and elsewhere in the world, but perhaps not so many in Iran itself. Besides, demanding technological efforts require not just individual talents but well-organized laboratories and industrial facilities.

Organization is indeed Iran's weakest point, with weighty consequences: after a century of oil drilling, for example, the state oil company still cannot drill exploratory wells without foreign assistance. In another example, even though the U.S. embargo was imposed almost 25 years ago, local industry cannot reverse-engineer spare parts of adequate quality for U.S.-made aircraft, which must therefore remain grounded or fly at great peril—there have been many crashes. Similarly, after more than sixty years of experience with oil refining at Abadan, existing capacity still cannot be increased without the aid of foreign engineering contractors, while the building of new refineries with local talent alone is deemed quite impossible. Iran must import one third of the gasoline it consumes because it cannot be refined at home.

In sum, there is no need to bomb Iran's nuclear installations at this time. The regime certainly cannot produce nuclear weapons in less than three years, and may not be able to do so even then because of the many technical difficulties not yet overcome.

To this it might be objected that the nuclear program clearly has priority over everything else, and receives funding in huge amounts. That is true enough. Although there are no reliable expenditure numbers for Iran's nuclear program, there is no need of numbers to establish its sheer magnitude. When the secret installations and activities revealed in August 2002 are added to those already publicly known, the total is impressive. It includes the Saghand ore-processing plant and uranium mine, the Tehran nuclear research center with its (very old) U.S.-supplied 5-megawatt research reactor, the nuclear technology center at Isphahan with four small Chinese-supplied research reactors, the Isphahan zirconium-production plant, the Bonab atomic-energy research center, the Anarak nuclear-waste storage site near Yazd, the Ardekan nuclear fuel plant, the shuttered Lashkar Ab'ad laser isotope separation plant, the Parchim, Lavizan II, and Chalous development facilities that eluded inspection, the Yazd radiation processing center, and finally the four largest and most important installations: the Bushehr reactor, the Isphahan uranium-hexafluoride conversion plant, the heavy-water and plutonium reactor and separation plant at Arak near the Kara-Chai River, some 150 miles south of Tehran, and the huge Natanz centrifuge complex between Isphahan and Kashan (at 33°43'24.43" N, 51°43'37.55"E, in case any friendly pilot should ask).

The last-named facility contains more than two dozen separate buildings within a perimeter of 4.7 miles, but of greatest interest are the two huge underground halls of 250,000 square feet each. Built with walls six feet thick and supposedly protected by two concrete roofs with sand and rocks in between—impressive to contemplate even if no dice against today's penetrating munitions—these halls are large enough to hold as many centrifuges as the Iranians could possibly want to make any number of uranium bombs or for that matter to fuel many reactors, always assuming of course that they can successfully manufacture, assemble, and operate centrifuge cascades.

That they can indeed do so is what Iranian spokesmen themselves now claim, and none more emphatically than Ahmadinejad, who insists that his countrymen have already mastered all the required processes and techniques. But is he right? He does possess a Ph.D. in engineering—won, however, in a special program for Pasdaran veterans and in the field of urban traffic management rather than nuclear engineering. What undermines confidence in Ahmadinejad's opinion is his rather expansive way with the facts, including his repeated assertion that the centrifuge technology was developed by Iranians in Iran and is "the proud achievement of the Iranian nation"—somehow overlooking the 99.99 percent of it that was purchased from A.Q. Khan.

Ahmadinejad aside, even casual observers must wonder how the world knows so much, in such exceptional detail, about Iran's once secret nuclear program, certainly as compared with what it knows of North Korea's program or what it knew of Iraq's at any point in time. Moreover, only a fraction of what it knows about the installations and processes at Arak, Isphahan, Natanz, and all the other places was uncovered by the much-advertised inspections of the IAEA; the recent Nobel Peace Prize won by its director Mohamed ElBaradei must have been a reward for effort rather than achievement. Satellite photography, too, is only part of the explanation, because one needs to know exactly where to look before it can be useful.

The conclusion is inescapable that among the scientists, engineers, and managers engaged in Iran's nuclear program—most of whom no doubt hold the same opinion of their rulers as do almost all educated Iranians—there are some who feel and act upon a higher loyalty to humanity than to the nationalism that the regime has discredited. Iran's regime, extremist but not totalitarian, does not and cannot control the movement of people and communications in and out of the country as North Korea does almost completely, and as Iraq did in lesser degree.

Because of the continuing flow of detailed and timely information out of Iran, it is possible both to overcome the regime's attempts at dispersion, camouflage, and deception and—if that should become necessary—to target air strikes accurately enough to delay Iran's manufacture of nuclear weapons very considerably. At the same time, there is no reason to attack prematurely, because there will be ample time to do so before it is too late—that is, before enough fissile material has been produced for one bomb.

And that brings us back to the beginning. What gives great significance to the factor of time is the advanced stage of the regime's degeneration. High oil prices and the handouts they fund now help to sustain the regime—but then it might last even without them, simply because of the power of any dictatorship undefeated in war. There is thus no indication that the regime will fall before it acquires nuclear weapons. Yet, because there is still time, it is not irresponsible to hope that it will.

By the same token, however, it is irresponsible to argue for coexistence with a future nuclear-armed Iran on the basis of a shared faith in mutual deterrence. How indeed could deterrence work against those who believe in the return of the twelfth imam and the end of life on earth, and who additionally believe that this redeemer may be forced to reveal himself by provoking a nuclear catastrophe?

But it is not necessary to raise such questions in order to reject coexistence with a nuclear Iran under its present leaders. As of now, in early 2006, with American and allied ground and air forces deployed on both sides of Iran in Afghanistan and Iraq, with powerful U.S. naval forces at sea to its south, with their own armed forces in shambles and no nuclear weapons, the rulers of Iran are openly financing, arming, training, and inciting anti-American terrorist organizations and militias at large. Under very thin cover, they are doing the same thing within neighboring Iraq, where they pursue a logic of their own by helping Sunni insurgents who kill Shiites, as well as rival Shiite militias that fight one another. If this is what Iran's extremist rulers are doing now even without the shield of nuclear weapons to protect them, what would they do if they had it? Even more aggression is the only reasonable answer, beginning with the subversion of the Arabian oil dynasties, where very conveniently there are Shiite minorities to be mobilized.

These, then, are the clear boundaries of prudent action in response to Iran's vast, costly, and most dangerous nuclear program. No premature and therefore unnecessary attack is warranted while there is still time to wait in assured safety for a better solution. But also and equally, Iran under its present rulers cannot be allowed finally to acquire nuclear weapons—for these would not guarantee stability by mutual deterrence but would instead threaten us with uncontrollable perils.

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Iran and the Bomb

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By Christopher de Bellaigue
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During the past few months, many nations have reached a consensus on the threat that Iran's nuclear program poses to international security. A similar consensus eluded the same nations in the debate over invading Saddam Hussein's Iraq three years ago. On March 8, the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna referred Iran's case to the Security Council. In public or private, but increasingly in public, senior officials from a wide range of countries—including the US, the EU states that vociferously opposed the invasion of Iraq, as well as India and Japan—speak of Iran's alleged pursuit of nuclear weapons with a conviction that suggests they regard it as an incontestable fact. Citing a series of deplorably anti-Israel statements by Iran's president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, officials from some of

the same countries express the fear that once Iran has the bombs it is assumed to be seeking, it will threaten Israel with a new and reckless vigor.

There is less agreement on the US contention that citizens of the Islamic Republic are captives of the country's clerical elite, and that other countries should strengthen Iran's pro-democracy organizations so that Iranians can enjoy, in George Bush's words, the "right to choose [their] own future." But this view may be spreading. In a recent speech, Jack Straw, the British foreign secretary, declared his support for Iranians' "aspirations for a freer and more democratic...future."

As the Security Council debates what to do about Iran in closed sessions during the coming months, Iran's relations with many countries will continue to worsen unless its leaders give in to international pressure and abandon their plans to become producers of nuclear fuel by enriching uranium, which they could use to make bombs. Between October 23, 2004, and January of this year, Iran had suspended work aimed at achieving a nuclear fuel cycle using enriched uranium. Then it started work on enrichment once again, and reacted to the IAEA's strong condemnation of this move by telling the agency that it could no longer inspect sites other than those that Iran had declared to be nuclear sites. On March 29, the Security Council issued a statement repeating the recent demand of the IAEA that Iran again suspend its work on uranium enrichment and allow the IAEA to inspect installations where nuclear work is suspected of going on.

If Iran refuses to comply with such demands, as it has vowed to do, and continues the uranium enrichment program that it started in January, a senior British official expects it to have acquired "the technology to enable it to develop a nuclear weapon" by the end of this year. If the Iranians do not back down, the US, Britain, and France are expected to try to persuade the Russians and Chinese to support a subsequent resolution declaring Iran in violation of international law.

Having agreed that the Security Council discuss Iran's behavior, Russia and China, however, have indicated that they oppose putting heavy political pressure on the Iranians. In the Security Council they will most likely insist that the IAEA must have the main responsibility for dealing with Iran's program, and that other UN action be delayed, if it is taken at all. Russia and China have large interests in Iran. The Chinese recently agreed to purchase a large amount of Iranian oil and gas during the next three decades. Russia considers the Islamic Republic an ally in its efforts to counter America's influence in the Middle East. It has also sold Iran civilian nuclear technology, a new air defense system, and civilian aircraft.

It is true that Russian officials were irritated by Iran's policy of prevarication while responding to their proposal that it transfer uranium-enrichment activities to Russian soil. Nonetheless, they maintain that excessive pressure on Iran may impel it to opt out of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) altogether, and end even the much-reduced access that inspectors now have to Iranian sites. The Iranians have not discouraged such speculation. Russia and China seem unlikely to join in the policy of sanctions against Iran that the US, Britain, and France hope that a coalition of countries will adopt should Iran refuse to comply with a putative resolution demanding that it stop its uranium enrichment program and accept more intrusive inspections.

To judge from his comments during a press conference on March 8, it seems that Mohamed ElBaradei, the IAEA's director general, has some sympathy for the Russian and Chinese positions. He called on the parties to avoid an "escalation" and engage in more talks. ElBaradei is said by diplomats to be deeply disappointed that after three years of intensive inspections and correspondence with the Iranian authorities, he can't say that the Iranian program is peaceful. In his most recent report, on February 27, he acknowledged that the IAEA has not seen in Iran "any diversion of nuclear material to nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices." But he was troubled that Iran had provided inadequate information about its program to develop centrifuges to enrich uranium. He was, he said, concerned about the ambiguous "role of the military" in the program. He mentioned a document sent to the Iranians from a supplier of nuclear technology described as suitable for the "fabrication of nuclear weapons components." The Iranians said the document was unsolicited.

ElBaradei's agency has much to lose if Iran achieves a fuel cycle and the ability to build a bomb at short notice. The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, signed by 188 nations, has been undermined by countries such as India, Pakistan, and Israel, which refused to sign it and have nuclear devices. North Korea withdrew from the treaty in 2003 and then claimed to have a nuclear device. The NPT would lose what little credibility it still has if Iran were to quit or were allowed to stay a member of the group of signers while remaining elusive about its nuclear program. If the NPT collapses, the result could well be

a nuclear arms race involving Saudi Arabia and other nations in the Middle East. EBaradei's extensive dealings with Iranian leaders, and particularly with its top nuclear officials, who answer to the supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, seem to have convinced him that the only solution is to negotiate a deal with Iran that will involve the US. On March 8, he called on the US to negotiate with Iran and stressed the need for "a comprehensive political settlement that takes account of all underlying issues."

As the Bush administration sees it, the main "underlying issue" is that Iran's fanatical and unpopular regime is secretly trying to build a bomb with which to threaten Israel and other countries. Only by asserting the possibility of sanctions or preventive war—the "meaningful consequences" to which Dick Cheney has referred—can the US and other influential nations stop this from happening. This reading of the Islamic Republic's position is misleading, however. First, it ascribes to a fractured and secretive state a transparency of intent and an ideological rigidity that it does not have. Second, it absolves the US of any responsibility for Iran's refusal to abandon its ambitions to have a fuel cycle, and of any obligation to use diplomatic means to persuade its leaders to change their mind.

The Iranians' ability to behave with startling pragmatism was first displayed during the Iran-contra scandal of 1986, when they were found to be cooperating with their American enemies to buy arms from Israel, whose right to exist they contested. After the death three years later of the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the Iranians developed relations with Saudi Arabia, a kingdom that Khomeini himself had loathed. The Iranians also indicated that they would take no action to implement the death sentence that Khomeini had passed on Salman Rushdie. After the attacks on America of September 11, Iran provided valuable support for the US-led invasion of Afghanistan and for the new Afghan government.

Iran's enmity toward Israel is more nuanced than Ahmadinejad's statements suggest. The President's declarations that Israel should be "wiped off the map," and that the Holocaust is a "myth," understandably aroused fears that Iran might be considering an attack on Israel. But Iran's senior civilian and military officials have insisted that Iran will strike Israel only if Israel strikes first. More significantly, the President and supreme leader have both reiterated Iran's longstanding demand for a referendum on the status of Israel that would involve all Palestinian refugees. This official position would not seem to be consistent with an ambition to destroy Israel by force, least of all by using nuclear arms, which would endanger the very Palestinians whom the Iranians claim to be protecting. Several senior Iranian officials, including Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, a former president who heads a powerful arbitration council in Tehran, have not disguised their irritation with the President's comments. But Ahmadinejad has benefited from the furor. By raising his prestige among hard-line Islamists around the world, the President has made it harder for his domestic opponents, who include Rafsanjani, to undermine him.

Iran's nuclear crisis centers on the Islamic Republic's ambitions and fears, and these are hard to identify when we consider the largely hidden decision-making process in Iran, where an elected president and parliament are subservient to an unelected supreme leader and other appointed bodies. All are in competition with one another and it is hard to know exactly how decisions are made. Seeking clues, one could do worse than review the deterioration in relations between Iran and the US since early 2002, when Bush included the Islamic Republic in his "axis of evil." At the time, I was told by Iranians connected to the clerical elite that this speech had convinced Iran's leaders that Bush intended to bring down the Islamic Republic. Iranian insecurities were subsequently heightened by the American invasion of Iraq, even though it got rid of one of Iran's worst enemies—and by the US's stated ambition to democratize the Middle East.

Unsurprisingly, Iran has obstructed George Bush's mission of regional transformation. The Iranians have been asserting their influence over neighboring Iraq, while doing nothing to help the US out of its predicament there. Iran has been channeling cash and arms to Iraqi Shiite groups, and it encourages commercial and philanthropic work in Iraq by Iranian citizens. In spite of Western pressure, the Iranians have not changed their support for other regional adversaries of the US, including Syria and such groups as Hezbollah (which Iran co-founded with Syria) and Hamas. Some Iranian leaders went out of their way to whip up religious anger against the West during the recent controversy over caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad that were published in a Danish newspaper. "Iran's aim," observes an experienced analyst in Tehran, "is to ensure that the Americans are too harassed to be able to threaten it."

Achieving a nuclear fuel cycle and the ability to build a bomb would give Iran's leaders a different degree of protection altogether. It would be in a position to deter attacks by any hostile power. Acquiring a fuel cycle, however, is a perilous undertaking. In a speech that he delivered to senior officials at the end of 2004, whose contents were recently made public, Hassan Rohani, then Iran's chief nuclear negotiator spoke of the intense diplomatic pressure being felt by Iran. "If we can one day complete this [uranium enrichment] cycle and present the world with a *fait accompli*," he said, the situation will change. The world didn't want Pakistan to get an atom bomb or Brazil to get a fuel cycle, but Brazil achieved a fuel cycle and Pakistan a bomb, and the world came to an accommodation with them...but we haven't yet achieved a full fuel cycle, and that, as it happens, is our main problem.

Iran's leaders are unlikely to abandon their plans to achieve a fuel cycle unless they believe that they will be more secure as a result. On February 15, after Condoleezza Rice asked Congress to allocate \$75 million to promote democracy in Iran, a senior US official, briefing journalists anonymously, predicted that the money would help Iranians "who wish to see a different type of Iran." Another official referred to Iranians' desire to live in "a different system." For Iran's leaders, the two main "underlying issues" that EIBaradei says should be discussed are their own security and America's readiness to coexist with an Islamic theocracy that it finds repugnant. The Bush administration has apparently adopted a policy of regime change toward Iran, although there seems no way it could accomplish this by military force. At the same time, the administration has been talking about possible meetings with Iranians concerning cooperation on achieving stability in Iraq—meetings that have yet to take place. When it comes to Iran, the administration doesn't appear to have a coherent idea of what it is doing.

Congress allocated \$19 million less than Rice asked for to promote Iranian democracy. If we count the \$10 million that had already been budgeted for this fiscal year but not yet spent, the administration has \$36 million available for improving and increasing the propaganda it transmits to Iran, and \$20 million to give to human rights organizations, NGOs, and labor unions, and to help Iranians who want to study in the US. This is a big increase over the \$3.5 million that was allocated last year for similar purposes. The State Department is also greatly increasing the number of officers who work on Iran. For the first time during his administration, Bush is devoting much attention to Iran.

That is good news for exiled Iranian opposition groups, many of which are based in the US. According to Connie Bruck's comprehensive report on these groups, which was published in *The New Yorker* on March 2, a potential recipient of funds is Reza Pahlavi, the forty-five-year-old son of the former shah and the proponent of a referendum that would let Iranians set up a constitutional monarchy, with him as shah, or a secular republic. The twenty-five Persian-language TV and radio stations that broadcast to Iran from Los Angeles, home to 600,000 Iranian exiles, may also apply to the US government for funds. Supporters of another group, the People's Mujahedin Organization of Iran, are pressing the State Department to lift its designation of the Mujahedin as a foreign terrorist organization. If that happens, the Bush administration will be free to consider giving it money.

It is hard for American organizations, even private ones, to have direct relations with Iranians inside the country. That was shown by the trial in 2002 in Tehran of Abbas Abdi, a prominent reformist, on charges of espionage. Abdi's crime was to organize opinion polls on behalf of the Gallup organization, one of which indicated that 74 percent of people living in Tehran wanted Iran to start an official dialogue with the US. (Abdi recanted in court, in response, it is now known, to judicial threats against his wife. He was jailed.) According to one of the Iranian officials who spoke on March 12, the Bush administration intends to use international NGOs and other organizations as go-betweens. This frank admission is likely both to make life harder for non-Iranian NGOs that have links to Iran and to increase the dangers facing Iranians who are in contact with them.

Before the invasion of Iraq, US government officials were misled by some Iraqi opposition groups and their American supporters into thinking that these groups had popular support at home, and that they had good information about the country. Similar claims are now being made about the Iranian groups. For her *New Yorker* piece, Connie Bruck spoke to Raymond Tanter, a former member of the US National Security Council and a visiting professor at Georgetown University. Tanter is urging the administration to lift the Mujahedin's designation as a terrorist organization. He believes, in Bruck's paraphrase, that the Mujahedin is "the only opposition group capable of overthrowing the regime." That would be news to the regime. The Mujahedin lost its credibility as a military force when its Iraq-based militants launched a suicidal attack on Iran at the end of the Iran-Iraq war in 1988; they expected to provoke popular rebellion but were crushed by Iran's forces. The organization's 3,500 remaining members have been disarmed by the US and live in a camp near the Iranian border. The

Mujahedin's alliance with Saddam Hussein turned most Iranians against it. Indeed, in more than five years of living in Iran, I have yet to hear an Iranian praise it.

Reza Pahlavi is less easy to dismiss. Some Iranians feel nostalgia for the prosperity and carefree hedonism of the time of the Shah, and they have a reflexive allegiance to his son. However, these sentiments do not seem widespread among the young people who make up most of the population; I have met plenty of young Iranians who favor a secular republic, but few who want a restoration of the monarchy. Pahlavi's association with some of his father's most reviled former allies, and his reliance on American largesse, have not enhanced his reputation. His main handicap is that of the exiled opposition as a whole; he has not seen Iran in twenty-seven years, and Iran has changed enormously in that time.

The exiles' understanding of their own country is occasionally delusional. Take, for example, Pahlavi's chief adviser, an Iranian businessman called Shahriar Ahy. He expects Iranians to begin a campaign of civil disobedience after a "national congress" of opposition groups that is being planned this summer in the US. "All have to cooperate to bring the regime down," Ahy told Bruck. "We would have five, six, seven clusters inside, coordinated for unity of action. So, at the same time, the Kurds would be doing this! The oil workers striking over here! So the wolves are not running after different zebras."

Ahy's fantasy illustrates the gulf between perceptions of Iranians in the US, where many believe that conditions for regime change have never been more propitious, and the reality in Iran. In the words of a leading literary dissident in Tehran, "For the first time since the last shah's accession, in 1941, Iran is bereft of any effective opposition, legal or illegal."

Eight months after Khatami stepped down as president and his reform movement came to an end, there is no progressive political movement to take its place. This is not surprising, for the reform movement attracted a generation of brilliant public figures—officials who worked for Khatami, writers, editors, student leaders—who have since, for the most part, been silenced. They have been jailed, driven into exile, or intimidated into staying quiet. The once-active student movement is moribund.

Bush has contributed to the sense of torpor and pessimism that now afflicts many politically imaginative Iranians. By including Iran in his "axis of evil" and repeatedly praising pro-democracy activists during periods of unrest, Bush gave conservative judges and their hard-line supporters in the press and television a pretext to label all reformists as traitors and the lackeys of America. Abbas Abdi's trial is only one example among many. Khatami has made it clear that he regards George Bush as partly responsible for his failure to reform Iran. Since Ahmadinejad's election and the subsequent worsening of Iran's diplomatic relations with many countries, it has become even harder for Iranians to express views in favor of more freedom of expression.

US officials have portrayed the Islamic Republic and its citizens as being monolithically opposed to one another. Again, this view is inaccurate. Iran's conservative leaders have presented their refusal to give up a fuel cycle program as an act of resistance against foreigners' efforts to deprive Iran of its rights. The success of this approach was apparent on February 11, when President Ahmadinejad addressed a huge crowd, estimated by foreign news agencies to number several hundred thousand people, that had gathered to celebrate the anniversary of revolution. It was the biggest such crowd in years. Sentiments in favor of the regime and strongly opposed to the US are stronger now than at any time since I first visited Iran, in 1999.

If Iran's leaders do not change their nuclear plans, some countries, including EU member states, will probably impose sanctions on the Islamic Republic later this year. At first, these will try to block help to Iran's civilian nuclear program—partly with the aim of preventing Iran's single, Russian-built, nuclear reactor from becoming active—and to stop Iranian officials from traveling abroad. European restrictions on investment may follow.

The threat of sanctions is already deterring investors in Iran, especially in the oil and gas industries on which the country's economy depends. Some foreign energy companies have postponed plans to develop Iran's liquid natural gas. Oil ministry officials fear that a lack of foreign investment in the oil industry may hinder Iran's chances of meeting its OPEC quota; they will soon launch a scheme to cut wasteful gasoline consumption.

The Iranian authorities reassure the public that sanctions will not threaten the high economic growth that the economy has enjoyed since the big oil price rise of 1999. Ahmadinejad's budget for the

coming Iranian year, which parliament ratified on March 14, has been criticized as extravagant and inflationary in its handouts to the poor, especially in the provinces. Khamenei has reminded Iranians that the sanctions that were formerly imposed on Iran, which included an oil embargo, stimulated the country to achieve self-sufficiency in many fields.

If that embargo were repeated, the inevitable collapse in revenues would threaten the Islamic Republic's survival. World oil prices would also soar, with threatening consequences for many of the world's economies. Iran has hinted that in response to sanctions it might block tanker traffic through the Strait of Hormuz, off its southern coast, further destabilizing the international economy.

The anticipated reluctance of many nations, including Russia and China, to impose such an embargo, and Iran's continuing progress toward a fuel cycle, increase the likelihood of attacks by the US or Israel on Iran's known and suspected nuclear sites. According to several recent analyses, including one by the International Crisis Group (ICG), only a major air campaign, entailing many civilian casualties, could do lasting damage to Iran's nuclear facilities. Iran might retaliate using its missiles, which can probably reach Israel, and it would certainly encourage its regional allies, including Shiite leaders in Iraq and its friends in Syria and Lebanon, to cause trouble in Iraq and Israel. (Hezbollah and Hamas have both pledged to retaliate on Iran's behalf in case it is attacked.) If Iran's leaders feel that the US is determined to destroy the Islamic Republic, they will not hesitate to cause chaos.

It is not unthinkable that an imaginative solution will be found to the immediate diplomatic impasse. (The ICG, for instance, proposes that the Iranians be permitted to have a small and heavily monitored enrichment facility, but to commission it only after several years of building confidence with the IAEA and the EU countries, among others.) That would be good news, but the underlying issue would still need to be addressed. That issue is what Iran's conservative leaders need to do to save themselves from being overwhelmed by George Bush's administration, whose plan to transform the Middle East has no room for undemocratic ayatollahs.

IRAQ

Stolen Away

Time

By Brian Bennett

5/1

The man on the phone with the 14-year-old Iraqi girl called himself Sa'ad. He was calling long distance from Dubai and telling her wonderful things about the place. He was also about to buy her. Safah, the teenager, was well aware of the impending transaction. In the weeks after she was kidnapped and imprisoned in a dark house in Baghdad's middle-class Karada district, Safah heard her captors haggling with Sa'ad over her price. It was finally settled at \$10,000. Staring at a floor strewn with empty whiskey bottles, the orphan listened as Sa'ad described the life awaiting her: a beautiful home, expensive clothes, parties with pop stars. Why, she'd be joining two other very happy teenage Iraqi girls living with Sa'ad in his harem. Safah knew that she was running out of time. A fake passport with her photo and assumed name had already been forged for her. But even if she escaped, she had no family who would take her in. She was even likely to end up in prison. What was she to do?

Safah is part of a seldom-discussed aspect of the epidemic of kidnappings in Iraq: sex trafficking. No one knows how many young women have been kidnapped and sold since the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003. The Organization for Women's Freedom in Iraq, based in Baghdad, estimates from anecdotal evidence that more than 2,000 Iraqi women have gone missing in that period. A Western official in Baghdad who monitors the status of women in Iraq thinks that figure may be inflated but admits that sex trafficking, virtually nonexistent under Saddam, has become a serious issue. The collapse of law and order and the absence of a stable government have allowed criminal gangs, alongside terrorists, to run amuck. Meanwhile, some aid workers say, bureaucrats in the ministries have either paralyzed with red tape or frozen the assets of charities that might have provided refuge for these girls. As a result, sex trafficking has been allowed to fester unchecked.

"It is a problem, definitely," says the official, who has heard specific reports from Iraqi aid workers about girls being kidnapped and sold to brothels. "Unfortunately, the security situation doesn't allow us to follow up on this." The U.S. State Department's June 2005 trafficking report says the extent of the

problem in Iraq is "difficult to appropriately gauge" but cites an unknown number of Iraqi women and girls being sent to Yemen, Syria, Jordan and Persian Gulf countries for sexual exploitation. Statistics are further made murky by tribal tradition. Families are usually so shamed by the disappearance of a daughter that they do not report kidnappings. And the resulting stigma of compromised chastity is such that even if the girl should resurface, she may never be taken back by her relations.

A visit to the Khadamiyah Women's Prison in the northern part of Baghdad immediately produces several tales of abduction and abandonment. A stunning 18-year-old nicknamed Amna, her black hair pulled back in a ponytail, says she was taken from an orphanage by an armed gang just after the U.S. invasion and sent to brothels in Samarra, al-Qaim on the border with Syria, and Mosul in the north before she was taken back to Baghdad, drugged with pills, dressed in a suicide belt and sent to bomb a cleric's office in Khadamiyah, where she turned herself in to the police. A judge gave her a seven-year jail sentence "for her sake" to protect her from the gang, according to the prison director.

Two other girls, Asmah, 14, and Shadah, 15, were taken all the way to the United Arab Emirates before they could escape their kidnappers and report them to a Dubai police station. The sisters were then sent back to Iraq but, like many other girls who have escaped their kidnappers and buyers, were sent to prison because they carried fake passports. There, they wait for the bureaucracy to sort out their innocence. What happened to the gang that took them? The sisters hear rumors that the men paid their way out of jail and are back on the streets. "I don't know what to do if the prison administration decides to release me," says Asmah, pushing back her gray head scarf to adjust her black hair. "We have no one to protect us."

Women's advocates are trying to set up halfway houses for kidnap survivors. The locations are secret to keep the women safe from both trafficking gangs trying to cover their tracks and outraged relatives who may try to kill the women to restore their clans' reputation. But the new Iraqi government has set up several bureaucratic roadblocks. Even organizations that do not receive government money have to secure permission from four ministries and the Baghdad city council for every shelter they hope to operate. Wringing her hands in exasperation, activist Yanar Mohammed says, "They want to close our women's shelter and deny our ability to open more."

That means that for girls like Safah, there are few havens left in Baghdad. In 2003, after Safah's father died, her grandmother took her to House of Children No. 2 orphanage in Adhamiya without the knowledge of most of her family. At the orphanage, she was befriended by an affable nurse who spent hours chatting up Safah, a fresh-faced girl whose fingers are still pudgy with baby fat. The nurse's modest hijab framed a sweet face that made Safah feel that the nurse was a good, spiritual woman, one she could trust. The nurse convinced Safah that she could be killed over the shame her disappearance had brought to her family. The nurse offered to adopt her. But official channels would have taken too long, so the nurse told Safah to hold her lower-right abdomen, scream and writhe on the carpet of the orphanage director's office, pretending to have appendicitis and requiring emergency medical assistance. Once at the hospital, the nurse whisked Safah into a waiting car.

The next three weeks were the worst in Safah's life. "I was tortured and beaten and insulted a lot in that house," Safah says. She wouldn't provide many details about what happened in the whiskey-soaked den in Karada. But she says that when it became apparent to her that she was about to be sold to Sa'ad, the man on the phone from Dubai, she became desperate. She passed word of her confinement to a neighborhood boy, who reported it to the local police station. Officers raided the place and arrested the nurse. Bureaucratic red tape somehow kept Safah and the nurse in the same prison for six months before Safah was finally released back into the custody of the orphanage a month ago.

At the orphanage, nestled behind a 10-ft. wall on the breezy banks of the Tigris, Safah can take computer classes, practice sewing and paint portraits of the family she wishes she had. But she doesn't feel as safe as she used to there. A social worker tells her that the nurse wasn't at the Khadamiyah Women's Prison during her last visit. Suddenly Safah rushes out of the room, crying and beating her head with her hands in the hallway. "If she is released," says Safah, her eyes darting back and forth in a panic, "I'm not staying here." But deep down she knows she has nowhere else to go.

Diplomacy: Has the Dealmaker Lost His Touch?

Newsweek

By Scott Johnson

Once again, U.S. Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad is basking in the limelight of another deal done. He arrived in Baghdad with all the glad-handing style of a politician on the campaign trail and has been a diplomatic whirlwind ever since. An Afghan-American Sunni Muslim, Khalilzad has drawn on his deep knowledge of the region and forceful personality to break political logjams on an impressive array of fronts. In little more than six months he has overseen a successful referendum, an election and the drafting of a constitution, and now, it seems, has put an end to the long political stalemate over who would be Iraq's next prime minister--with the right to form the country's first bona fide new government.

The breakthrough came abruptly when the Shiite United Iraqi Alliance tapped Jawad al-Maliki as its new prime ministerial candidate, after the unpopular incumbent Ibrahim Jaafari agree to step aside. Sunni and Kurdish parties had bitterly opposed Jaafari, accusing him of sectarian bias. Though a close Jaafari ally, who recently headed a committee that purged Sunni loyalists from top government posts, Maliki appears to be acceptable to all Iraqi factions. For Khalilzad, it was a personal triumph culminating months of daily meetings with top Iraqi leaders and near-constant convoying in and out of the Green Zone. Yet he may have paid a high price. By so immersing himself in the factional politicking involved in getting to this moment, he may have undermined his future effectiveness.

A sign of this potential trouble was last week's deal itself. For all Khalilzad's aggressive ground-work, it appears to have been clinched not by him but by the United Nations envoy Ashraf Qazi. Meanwhile, the American pleni-potentiary finds himself increasingly sniped at from all sides. The charge, however undeserved, is essentially that he's taken sides in Iraq's tribal conflicts. Indeed, the very qualities that have served him thus far--his ethnic background and regional expertise--may be turning into a liability. "The Shia think he's a Sunni," says Vali Nasr, author of "The Shia Revival," summing up the problem. "Some refer to him as a professional Sunni."

These doubts began to take root in the days after last January's elections, when the details of an American "Sunni outreach" program emerged. By meeting in face-to-face discussions with Sunni leaders, Khalilzad hoped to draw them toward the political mainstream and away from violence. To appear evenhanded in a country with a massive Shia majority, he went out of his way to criticize top Shiites such as Interior Minister Bayan Jabr for allowing militias to proliferate and operate freely. Angry Shia promptly accused Khalilzad of Sunni bias. "Zal tried to do something new," says Kashif al-Ghita, a leading Shia intellectual. "The Shia are afraid that this relationship between the Americans and the Sunnis is going to grow."

Shia sensitivities were further inflamed after the Feb. 22 bombing of the Askari shrine in Samarra. During several days of some of the worst sectarian violence Iraq has seen, Khalilzad continued his outreach to the Sunnis, prompting such Shia power brokers as militia leader Moqtada al-Sadr to call for the ambassador's resignation. Demonstrations in Karbala have more recently occasioned similar calls for Khalilzad's removal; among Shia leaders, in fact, Khalilzad has been nicknamed "Abu Omar," a reference to a Sunni caliph whom the Shia particularly despise.

Such suspicions were heightened during U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's recent trip to Baghdad, when she met privately with Sunni leaders some Shia see as sympathetic to the insurgency. "Khalilzad has ties to the Shia, but now it has become different," says Sheik Humam Hammoudi, a leading Shia cleric from the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq. "Suspicion has become the dominant feeling toward him."

Now that wariness is giving way to open criticism. Growing numbers of Shia leaders warn publicly that Khalilzad's policies threaten to undermine Iraq's stability and, by extension, U.S. goals in Iraq. Sunni extremists, they say, are being encouraged to pursue a dual-track strategy: engaging with America and the Iraqi political process, on the one hand, and continuing violent resistance on the other. "Zal had many friends when he came," says national-security adviser Mowaffaq al-Rubaie. "But this whole appeasement policy is not going to work." Even some Sunnis have begun to think that Khalilzad's support has become a handicap. "If someone else came and did the same things, but was a Christian, it would be better," says Mishan al-Jibouri, an outspoken Sunni parliamentarian. "Then the Shia couldn't say what's happening is because Zal is a Sunni, and there would be more freedom."

In the end, the choice of a new P.M. may mark a turning point not only for Iraq, but for Khalilzad,

whose troubles with the Shia may only have be-gun. If Iraqi politicians, for better or worse, have come to see him as one of their own, his job will be all the harder.

Iraqi Nukes: Fallout From U.S. Strikes

Newsweek

By Michael Hirsh

5/1

The administration may be making contingency plans to bomb Iran's nuclear sites if diplomacy fails. Apart from the geopolitical fallout of such a strike, there's reason to worry about the environmental impact. The International Atomic Energy Agency, which monitors Tehran's activities, is raising questions about dangers stemming from U.S. strikes on Iraq's biggest nuclear site during the 2003 invasion. In a report to be posted on the IAEA's Web site this week, the agency states that about 1,000 Iraqi men, women and children in a village near the former Tuwaitha nuclear research facility are living inside an area contaminated by radioactive residue and ruin. "I can only guess that a lot of the damage at Tuwaitha was from bombing," Dennis Reisenweaver, an IAEA safety expert, told NEWSWEEK. "Any time you damage a facility that uses radioactive material, you have potential for spreading contamination." He said the agency was looking at other damaged Iraqi sites as well, but did not yet know the overall health impact. Asked to comment on the bombing, a spokesman for U.S. Central Command, Lt. Col. Barry Johnson, said, "We have no record of that here."

Stuck in the Hot Zone

Newsweek

By Michael Hirsh

5/1

Maj. Micah Morgan fondly pats the nose of his Predator drone, much as a cavalry officer of old might have stroked the muzzle of his prized horse. "This is the future of the Air Force," says Morgan, a former B-1 bomber pilot. It is a glorious day in the Sunni Triangle. Outside the "wire" of Balad Air Base the insurgency still rages and sectarian war looms, but the sky above is a deep azure and, no small thing, wholly American-owned. A relaxed Morgan watches from the shade of Saddam Hussein's old hardened hangars as another Predator--an unmanned craft about the size of a Cessna--approaches for a remote-control landing at the vast airfield after a recon mission. Stepping into one of his modular "ground-control stations," which are encased in steel and shipped to Balad as single units, Morgan flicks on a screen that shows his flock of drones (the exact number is classified, but it's the largest fleet in the world) hovering over Baghdad, each carrying two Hellfire missiles and searching with uncanny clarity for insurgents and other signs of trouble.

The American airman who is piloting these drones, however, is not in Iraq. He is 7,000 miles away, in Las Vegas. Once Morgan's small crew at Balad gets the Predators aloft--a tricky business that still requires on-site piloting, as does landing--they are switched by satellite to the control of an operator at Nellis Air Force Base outside Sin City. Then, using new "Rover" technology, whatever the Predators spot on their cameras and infrared heat detectors can be beamed to the onboard screen of any ground commander in a Humvee, Bradley or tank. In the future, that commander will likely be a U.S. officer embedded in an Iraqi Army or police unit, feeding intel to his Iraqi prot©.g©.s. Morgan, who still marvels at the idea, says: "Some guy in Vegas gets to knock off at 7, go out to the casino or lay out by the pool, and he's just flown a combat mission in Iraq." And the new Predators soon to be deployed at Balad are going to be bigger and better, carrying more Hellfires, and some larger JDAM bombs as well. Huge new ramps and runway aprons are also under construction. These are designed, in part, to accommodate a C-130 cargo squadron that moved here from Kuwait in January to relieve vulnerable Army supply convoys in Iraq.

With 27,500 landings and takeoffs a month, Balad is second only to London's Heathrow airport in traffic worldwide, according to Brig. Gen. Frank Gorenc, the base commander and leader of 332nd Air Expeditionary Wing. In an interview with NEWSWEEK, Gorenc said he's "normalizing" the giant Balad airfield, or gradually rebuilding it to U.S. military specs. The Saddam-era concrete is considered too substandard for the F-16s, C-130s and other aircraft that fly in and out so regularly, they crack the tarmac. At this point, virtually none of the traffic is Iraqi: the national Air Force has only three crews of

transport airmen. "It's safe to say Balad will be here for a long time," says Gorenc, who feels at home in Iraqi skies, where the Air Force has been having its way since the first Gulf War. "One of the issues of sovereignty for any country is the ability to control their own airspace. We will probably be helping the Iraqis with that problem for a very long time."

If you want an image of what America's long-term plans for Iraq look like, it's right here at Balad. Tucked away in a rural no man's land 43 miles north of Baghdad, this 15-square-mile mini-city of thousands of trailers and vehicle depots is one of four "superbases" where the Pentagon plans to consolidate U.S. forces, taking them gradually from the front lines of the Iraq war. (Two other bases are slated for the British and Iraqi military.) The shift is part of Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's plan to draw down U.S. ground forces in Iraq significantly by the end of 2006. Pentagon planners hope that this partial withdrawal will, in turn, help take the edge off rising opposition to the war at home--long enough to secure Iraq's nascent democracy.

But the vast base being built up at Balad is also hard evidence that, despite all the political debate in Washington about a quick U.S. pullout, the Pentagon is planning to stay in Iraq for a long time--at least a decade or so, according to military strategists. Sovereignty issues still need to be worked out by mutual, legal agreement. But even as Iraqi politicians settle on a new prime minister, Jawad al-Maliki--they also are welcoming the long-term U.S. presence. Sectarian conflict here has worsened in recent months, outstripping the anti-American insurgency in significance, and many Iraqis know there is no alternative to U.S. troops for the foreseeable future. "I think the presence of the American forces can be seen as an insurance policy for the unity of Iraq," says national-security adviser Mowaffaq al-Rubaie.

There is ample evidence elsewhere of America's long-term plans. The new \$592 million U.S. Embassy being built at the heart of Baghdad's "international zone" is "massive ... the largest embassy to date," says Maj. Gen. Chuck Williams, head of the State Department's Overseas Building Operations office. In an interview with NEWSWEEK, Williams called it the "most ambitious project" his office has undertaken in its history (graphic). Officials in both the executive branch and Congress say they are unaware of any serious planning, or even talk inside the national-security bureaucracy, about a full withdrawal. The Pentagon has one intel officer assigned to produce and update analyses regarding the consequences of a U.S. pullout. But the job is only a part-time assignment, according to a Pentagon source who asked for anonymity because of the sensitive subject matter. As President George W. Bush himself said in March, the final number of U.S. troops "will be decided by future presidents and future governments of Iraq."

Life on the emerging Iraqi superbases is safer and easier than elsewhere in the country. Though soldiers and airmen at Balad jokingly call it "Mortarville," no one's been hit since January. And compared to the muddy, Porta Potti unpleasantness U.S. servicemen endure out at approximately 75 small "forward operating bases," Balad is shaping up to resemble a warrior's country club. A new rec hall is being built, with a 24/7 cybercaf^e, a premium coffee shop (Green Beans, known as the soldier's Starbucks worldwide), an indoor mini-golf course and a movie theater. There is an outdoor and an indoor pool left over from Uday Hussein's days training Iraqi Olympians here, but few remaining signs of the Hussein family, or indeed of anything Iraqi at all: to get to the big pool you head down Texas Avenue, around Victory Loop past David Letterman Boulevard and then down Balad's main drag, called Pennsylvania Avenue.

True, most Iraqis don't like the U.S. occupation today any better than they did a year ago, or two, or three. But with the exception of radical cleric Moqtada al-Sadr, no major politician is calling for U.S. withdrawal. "Even guys who want Americans to leave, they know it will be civil war if they do," says Ahmed al-Jobory, an unemployed chemical engineer working at Balad. What is emerging is a sense of psychological dependency. Even the new Iraqi Army, on which Washington is spending billions, is designed to be weak. The Army just received its first armor from the United States: light-skinned Humvees. But the Pentagon won't be giving up any tanks. "The goal is to have them equipped to fight a counterinsurgency, not to defend against external threats," says Lt. Col. Michael Negard, public-affairs officer for the Multinational Security Transition Command in Iraq. (The military says it needs to help the Iraqi Army win the fight it's in now, not the battles of the future.)

U.S. officials routinely deny that America intends to put down permanent bases. "A key planning factor in our basing strategy is that there will be no bases in Iraq following Operation Iraqi Freedom," says Lt. Col. Barry Johnson, a spokesman for centcom in Baghdad. "What we have in Iraq are 'contingency bases,' intended to support our operations in Iraq on a temporary basis until OIF is complete." But

according to the Congressional Research Service, the Bush administration has asked for more than \$1.1 billion for new military construction in Iraq, roughly double what it plans to spend in Kuwait, Qatar and United Arab Emirates combined. Of that, the single biggest share is intended for Balad (\$231 million).

Technically, Colonel Johnson may be telling the truth about the Pentagon's long-term plans. But it is also true that the U.S. government has never drawn up plans for "permanent" military bases, even when it ended up staying for half a century. In Korea, where tens of thousands of U.S. soldiers have been deployed for 55 years, since the end of the Korean War, "they're only just now moving American troops out of temporary facilities like huts to real buildings," says John Pike, a Washington security expert. A White House official, asked last week about long-term U.S. plans, himself made the analogy to Asia and to Germany. In every conflict the United States has recently been involved in, except Vietnam, U.S. forces have remained in the country, said the official, who asked for anonymity because the matter is considered sensitive.

In fact, the plans for Balad fit in with Rumsfeld's larger designs for a dramatic reconfiguring of U.S. forces overseas. Big cold-war bases, with tens of thousands of permanently garrisoned troops, are on the way out. On the way in: giant "lily pads" for expeditionary U.S. forces to use only when needed, with ready equipment warehoused there. Balad, with its huge offramps and aprons, is a testing ground for that concept, according to several Pentagon officials. Major Morgan, for one, describes the deployment of Predators that are piloted from the United States as a "perfect example of being expeditionary."

One big question is whether a reduced but long-term U.S. presence in Iraq can be effective. Counterinsurgency experts say that sectarian conflict and insurgencies simply can't be fought from the air. And the Air Force officers at Balad say that, at long last, they're getting that message. The result is that, rather than dropping bombs, F-16s in Iraq today are doing police work from 15,000 feet, using brand-new advanced targeting pods, which can pick up activity on the ground day or night. Since January, says F-16 squadron commander Pete (Guns) Gersten, he has been feeding the info to his Army "brothers" rather than bombing the targets. "The Army said, 'Every time you blow stuff up, we get it back five times [in reprisals]'," he says. "So now we just do a lot of surveillance for the Army. They say it's time to start building. It's time to quit blowing things up."

But Gersten adds that, when it comes to preventing all-out civil war, control of the skies is crucial. "When I show up at a firefight, it stops," he says. "We're the big brother." Bristle-headed and lean in his tan flight suit, Gersten looks very much like a character out of "Top Gun." Is he a tad overconfident? Perhaps. But he fairly well sums up how Washington sees its role in Iraq today--and for a long time to come.

LEBANON

A Dangerous Dance

Newsweek

By Lally Weymouth

5/1

Lebanon's new prime minister, Fuad Siniora, visited President Bush last week to appeal for support. Lebanon is struggling to emerge as a democratic country--free from Syria's grip. Yet Damascus still wields vast influence over the affairs of its weaker neighbor, in part through a potent network of intelligence agents. NEWSWEEK's Lally Weymouth spoke with Siniora in New York last week. Excerpts:

WEYMOUTH: What did you request from President Bush?

SINIORA: I came to ask President Bush three specific things. One is to empower the Lebanese government politically. The most important point is to help Lebanon achieve the full integrity of all its territories and [to achieve] the withdrawal of Israel from the remaining parts of Lebanon which are still occupied, the Sheba Farms.

According to the U.N. secretary-general and the Security Council, Israel fully withdrew from Lebanon in 2000; Sheba Farms was [considered] Israeli-occupied Syrian land.

Sheba Farms is Lebanese. The Syrians say verbally that it is Lebanese. [But] they don't provide the necessary documentation to the United Nations.

So your No. 1 aim is to get Israel out of Sheba Farms. What's No. 2?

No. 2 is to [enhance] the capabilities of Lebanon's internal security forces and its Army, by providing equipment and training.

And the president said?

Yes. We will be sending some ministers to the U.S. to discuss this.

And No. 3?

To empower the Lebanese government economically.

One of the March 14th [pro-freedom] group's aims was to get rid of President Lahoud [who has strong ties to Syria]. In order to have a free Lebanon, don't you have to get a new president, and how are you going to do that?

I would recommend for the president to resign. If that happens, it will open new horizons for the country.

Do you think that the Syrians have threatened Lahoud? Could he quit or would they kill him?

I think, personally, he is not the type to do that.

They would kill him?

I don't want to use that term. He is not free to resign.

Who can disarm Hizbullah as required by the U.N. resolution?

If the U.S. and friendly countries help us achieve the withdrawal of Israel from Sheba Farms, this would make it possible for the Lebanese forces to be the sole owner of weapons and arms in the country.

Why would Hizbullah give up their weapons? Didn't they threaten you and tell you not to come here?

They didn't threaten me, though some of them said I should not come.

But Hizbullah has strong ties to Iran, as the recent U.N. report points out. It says that arms came to Hizbullah via Syria during the last six months.

It [records] one incident in which 12 trucks were smuggled into Lebanon for Hizbullah from Syria.

Is it Syria's President Assad who would have to disband Hizbullah?

Assad will play an effective role in this regard. ... Things in Lebanon cannot happen by mere force [but] through dialogue and achieving the objectives that were set by Hizbullah. Hizbullah has several objectives that I subscribe to: release the [Lebanese] detainees; ask the Israelis to provide us with maps of the land mines that they planted in Lebanon, and stop the aerial and sea violations of our airspace and waters.

Would you talk to Israel directly about this?

No. We do not have any diplomatic relations with Israel.

Why don't you normalize relations with Israel?

We will upon the finalization of the peace process.

Didn't Hizbullah kidnap three Israeli soldiers in 2000?

Didn't Israel kill tens of thousands of civilians?

Israel withdrew from Lebanon.

Israel must hand over the Sheba Farms. Then Hizbullah will be in position to hand over arms to the government.

How strong is Syria's influence in Lebanon today?

Syria has its men and people in the country: supporters, some politicians and quite a number of Syrian intelligence agents. They are effective.

Weren't they behind the killings of journalists and politicians?

There is a wide perception in the country [to that effect], but I don't have any smoking gun.

Allegedly they killed [former prime minister] Hariri.

That is the perception. I am in no position, in all honesty, to make any accusations.

What do you hope to achieve at the U.N.?

I am requesting a decision to form an international tribunal to look into the death of Hariri, and I'm also asking that Sheba Farms is recognized by the United Nations as Lebanese.

You have been hoping to exchange ambassadors with Syria and to demarcate the Lebanese-Syrian boundary, but Syria ...

POLITICS & POLICY

Gas Gouge?

National Review

By William F. Buckley Jr.

4/25

The gas problem was nicely framed in the past fortnight by two news items. The first was the report that Lee Raymond received \$400 million in his retirement package as chairman of ExxonMobil. The second was the published sketch of the projected backboard for airline passengers willing to travel more or less standing up, helping out the airlines' need for extra revenues to pay for-Lee Raymond's gas.

That is a populist formulation, invited by recent news. Concerning it, a few comments.

--Mr. Raymond is correctly charged with, at the least, an extraordinary act of indecorum. Granted, the capitalist model does not (and should not) limit the size of a wage or a bonus. ExxonMobil paid \$23 billion in taxes last year, which gives us some idea of the scale of an activity whose gross income exceeds the combined income of IBM, General Motors, and AT&T. Which is why it is best to fault Raymond and the directors of ExxonMobil using the language of civility: a lack of decorum is what it was. One correctly declines to specify a limitation on figures that arise from the workings of the marketplace, which are not to be confused with machinations of the marketplace. If Mr. Raymond were guilty of a violation of antitrust laws, or of the anti-gouging laws, one could look at the towering figure of his retirement package as corresponding perfectly to the high reaches of avarice and contrivance.

But no such charges have been leveled. Which means observers are left to cope with the sheer vulgarity of the transaction, wondering how it happened. Why didn't the directors put on such brakes as decency required? Why didn't Mr. Raymond stop after, say, \$100 million, and assign the rest to a fund to help standing-room-only airline passengers?

The public reaction tends to indignation and then to wondering about means of punishment.

But means of punishment are difficult to come up with. Ideally one would see stockholder action resulting in the ouster of every director of ExxonMobil who voted to authorize the gargantuan retirement package. The shareholders of ExxonMobil have direct means of expressing themselves: by voting against the current directors, or by selling their shares in the company, if they believe that the profligate sum paid to Mr. Raymond is an indication of company extravagance.

What about that general public? How can it punish directors who do not do the right thing?

The directest way, of course, is to withhold economic support. If ExxonMobil manufactured a brand of peanut butter, the public could express itself on the subject by boycotting ExxonMobil peanut butter.

This doesn't work, of course, when it is gasoline being sold at the pump. Gas is gas-fungible stuff. Pausing at the pump we do not deliberate whether what we are paying for is gas that originated in Oklahoma or in Nigeria.

And indignation at oil prices is not intelligently exercised by legislative action.

Factors here to be considered are varied.

--In the past 20 years, profits from oil and gas investment have been lower than the profits from many alternative economic enterprises. Ten percent profit is normal (and normative). Oil and gas investments have tended to run two or three points lower than that ten percent.

--To effect an increase in supply requires a lot of investment and a lot of patience. Five to ten years, significantly to increase supply.

--The stranglehold of OPEC is not easily dealt with by normal economic responses, given that it is a politically controlled oligopoly.

--The causes of significant shortfalls in oil production are often political. Mexico is off on another nationalistic excess. Nigeria is in turmoil, reducing production. Iraq is almost one million barrels a day under what it used to produce. Iran is a day-by-day disrupter. The Saudis, who in the past, have with their huge reserves acted as a kind of federal bank, are needing to do more development.

There isn't anything the U.S. can do--except keep its legislative fingers out of the stew. And open its blinded eyes to the possibilities of nuclear energy.

The Seinfeld Summit
Weekly Standard
By Dan Blumenthal
5/1

THE SINO-AMERICAN AGENDA includes the nuclear programs of Iran and North Korea, trade, energy, simmering disputes over Taiwan and Japan, and democracy. Why, then, was the most newsworthy event of the Bush-Hu summit last week the protests of a Falun Gong member on the White House lawn?

Because the Bush administration finds it difficult to reach agreement with a Chinese government that poses an age old dilemma of statecraft: How to respond to a rising power whose intentions are uncertain? History teaches that more often than not rising powers define their interests quite differently from existing powers, and China is proving no exception.

The Clinton administration's answer was a policy of "comprehensive engagement," the primary purpose of which was to secure China's acceptance of the American-led international system. The policy was also guided by a belief that economic growth, bolstered by international trade, would lead Beijing toward political freedom. At the same time, the Clinton administration responded to Beijing's muscle flexing, especially after China fired missiles into the Taiwan Strait in 1996, by beginning the process of upgrading defense ties with Japan, and reopening closed doors to Taiwan.

A decade later China has been comprehensively engaged--Washington granted China permanent normal trade relations status, which helped ease Beijing's entry into the World Trade Organization. It is now one of the United States' largest trading partners, and its rapid economic growth has made it a player on the world stage. But Beijing remains stubbornly authoritarian and has shown little interest in political liberalization.

In the meantime, China has also become a military challenge--the country that has "the greatest potential to compete militarily with the United States," in the words of the Pentagon's latest Quadrennial Defense Review. China is employing what it terms its "comprehensive national power" to gradually replace America as Asia's preeminent power. In addition, Beijing has used its new international prominence to provide diplomatic succor to such international menaces as Iran, Venezuela, and Sudan.

How is the Bush administration responding? With an ever so slight policy adjustment. The administration now openly talks of a "hedging strategy." The new National Security Strategy states: "Our strategy seeks to encourage China to make the right strategic choices for its people, while we hedge against other possibilities."

That is not to say engagement has been abandoned. In a major speech last September, Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick articulated a continued, albeit more muscular, policy of engagement: America will now hold China accountable for irresponsible international behavior.

Senior administration officials were quick to elaborate on what they meant by "hedging." In testimony before a congressional commission, Assistant Secretary of Defense Peter Rodman explained: "Absent greater openness, international reactions to China's military growth will understandably hedge against these unknowns." At a trilateral strategic dialogue with Japan and Australia in March, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said: "I think all of us have a responsibility and an obligation to try and ensure that the rise of China is peaceful and does not lead to negative outcomes."

When an authoritarian country with an opaque defense budget is building up its military capability at a fast pace, it is prudent to hedge your bets. While we are told one thing by the Chinese--all they seek is a peaceful environment to promote their growth and development--we see something else, a more activist China.

In the past decade, China has introduced military capabilities into the region that have already changed the balance of power. As Rodman put it, "When you go from zero to 700 missiles in the Strait in a decade, that changes the status quo."

China now poses what military planners call the greatest "anti-access" and "area denial" challenge to U.S. forces in the Pacific. Beijing has introduced ballistic and cruise missiles, information warfare capabilities, a fleet of diesel electric submarines, advanced destroyers, and air defenses that make it more difficult for the United States to meet the defense commitments that have kept the peace in the region since the end of World War II.

If pressed, Chinese officials will say this buildup is all about Taiwan. If the United States and China can successfully unify Taiwan with China, there would be no problem, the line goes. But does anybody really believe that China will draw down its military if it successfully unifies with Taiwan? Rising powers have a way of growing accustomed to their newfound strength and revising their ambitions accordingly.

Japan does not think China's only strategic goal is Taiwan, and neither do Singapore and India, countries that are modernizing their militaries with China on their minds.

The U.S. response was laid out by the Pentagon official in charge of planning, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Resources and Plans James Thomas: "[We are] looking at making adjustments in our naval posture globally, shifting to six carrier battle groups in the Pacific region . . . as well as over the next several years shifting approximately 60 percent of our attack submarine fleet to the Pacific." And the Pentagon is looking at developing a new long-range bomber.

So shoring up alliances and partnerships and adjusting our force posture to the new strategic reality are the hedging part of our China policy. What about the diplomacy piece of the puzzle: getting China

to "make the right strategic choices for its people" (code for democratization) and to contribute to the international system rather than simply extracting benefits from it?

Here, our success has been limited. Efforts to give China the lead in talks to denuclearize North Korea have not borne fruit: Beijing seems satisfied with a status quo of intermittent diplomacy that subordinates denuclearizing North Korea to simply getting countries to the negotiating table. Likewise, China extracts great energy benefits from its relationship with Iran while spurning international efforts to get the mullahs to abandon their nuclear ambitions. Presumably this is not the kind of "responsible stakeholder" behavior Zoellick called for.

Getting the Chinese Communist party to see democracy as in its interest will be even tougher going. The urban business elites, high-level party members and their families, and even many public intellectuals who have been co-opted or bought off have a strong interest in maintaining the current system.

Reconciling engagement and hedging policies is difficult. The one is based on trust, and the other, suspicion. We are thus sending mixed messages to allies who may be needed should relations with Beijing deteriorate. It will be far easier for those in Europe and Asia who are economically invested in China to say that more engagement is needed if China grows more confrontational.

And of course strategy is interactive: China will respond. Beijing will target our allies with inducements and implicit threats. Australia, for example, whose economy is booming thanks in large part to exports to China, was asked last year to "re-look" at the ANZUS treaty--i.e., reconsider its security alliance with the United States. Canberra's answer was Australia's polite equivalent of "pound sand," but we can expect more of the same.

For every move we make--building a partnership with India, for example--China counters with its own. In addition, China will continue to push for regional groupings that exclude the United States, work with Russia to try and eject the United States from Central Asia, and come into our own backyard by forging partnerships with the likes of Venezuela's Hugo Chavez.

So what should we do? The current policy framework is a start, with certain conditions. China should really be held to account, not only by the United States but also by other major trading partners such as the E.U., Japan, and Australia, for irresponsible behavior. Iran is a perfect test case: a threat that the world's democracies actually agree upon. If China is not willing to risk its energy deals with the mullahs to get them to denuclearize, Beijing should be publicly condemned, and its leaders should certainly not be received in America or Europe as if they were true partners.

Democracy promotion should be at the top of the agenda as well. The United States and other democracies should make a point of meeting with groups and individuals who are not sanctioned by the Communist party--lawyers representing peasant groups, religious groups, and NGOs highlighting environmental degradation.

It is important to remember two things as we deal with Beijing: China is not just the CCP; it also comprises dissidents and activists agitating for more freedom; and China's major trading partners still have more leverage over Beijing than vice versa. Yes, America benefits from trade with China, but without the American market the Chinese economy would come close to collapse. The message to China should be clear: We accept you if you play by the rules, which in the 21st century means becoming a democracy, joining in international efforts to keep the most dangerous weapons from getting into the hands of the most dangerous regimes, and settling differences with neighbors such as Taiwan and Japan through diplomacy, not military intimidation.

So why was the Bush-Hu meeting, like a Seinfeld episode, a "summit about nothing"? It could well be that China has no interest in becoming a "responsible stakeholder," and President Bush knows this. After all, if the United States and Europe are prepared to play bad cop on Iran, Beijing has every incentive to play good cop--far better to enjoy the fruits of those energy deals without angering the mullahs. It is up to Washington and its allies to create incentives for Beijing to play ball. One way to start is no more "summits about nothing" until China begins acting responsibly.

--Dan Blumenthal is a resident fellow in Asian studies at the American Enterprise Institute.

Turnout Is Destiny

Weekly Standard

By Fred Barnes

5/1

NOW THAT HE'S BACK IN the elections business, Karl Rove has a huge task on his hands: assuring strong Republican voter turnout. At the moment, Republicans are in a funk. And their dejected mood may presage a low turnout in the midterm election on November 7. Should a large number of Republican voters sit this one out, Republicans could lose control of one or both houses of Congress. It's when Republicans are either inspired or angry that they show up in large numbers and win elections. So Rove, along with Republican national chairman Ken Mehlman, has the job of shaping issues that will make Republicans angry or inspired, or both.

There's one big problem--two, actually. First, Rove's magic won't affect the biggest issues dogging the Bush presidency and causing Republicans to be disheartened: Iraq and rising gas prices. But the second problem--President Bush's sagging job approval among Republicans--is one that Rove can address by emphasizing policies that appeal to Republicans and by creating strong fears of a Democratic takeover.

Let's be clear about turnout. It matters enormously. The sweeping Republican defeat following Watergate in 1974 was only indirectly related to the scandal. The Democratic landslide was directly attributable to the diminished Republican turnout that resulted from Watergate-induced dejection among Republicans.

More recently, the turnout factor has been the single greatest influence on midterm elections. In 1990, 27.4 million Americans voted for Republican House candidates, and the party lost 8 seats. In 1994, however, the Republican turnout jumped to 36.3 million, and the party captured 52 House seats. It dipped in 1998 to 32 million, prompting a loss of 5 seats. But in 2002 it soared to 37 million, and Republicans won 8 House seats.

In presidential election years, jacking up turnout is relatively doable, as the Bush campaign showed in 2004. Presidential elections unleash "incredible energy," a senior Bush adviser says, and that generates volunteers, donors, a campaign infrastructure, and a flood of voters to the polls. "By definition there's less energy," says the adviser, in nonpresidential years--and less infrastructure for a national campaign. The "key" in these years, the adviser continues, is to make "your base as inspired as possible."

With the 2006 midterm election six months away, the Republican base is uninspired. In the Fox News poll in mid-April, only 66 percent of Republicans said they looked favorably on the Bush presidency. This is a disastrous number for Republicans. Of course, it wasn't as bad as the overall Bush rating of 33 percent, which included Democrats and independents.

Low job approval can have a double whammy effect. By itself, a 66 percent rating means that turnout by Republicans is likely to be low. In 2002 and 2004, when Republicans won House seats, Bush's approval among Republicans was 20 or more points higher.

The second effect is to cause further Republican disenchantment. Low poll numbers like 33 percent approval are bound to prompt some Republicans to feel they must separate themselves from Bush and join in criticizing him and Republicans in Congress. This, in turn, leads to lower turnout.

It's a vicious political cycle, but it's not the end of the world for Republicans. There's a lot Rove can do now that he's freed from the administrative duties that went with his old job as deputy chief of staff. He's back to his first-term job as the chief political strategist for Bush and the Republican party. And he has closer ties to the new chief of staff, Josh Bolten, than he did to Bolten's predecessor, Andy Card. He's in a position to invigorate Bush's message and rally Republicans.

A political adviser who works closely with Rove has developed a list of issues that Republicans should concentrate on to spur turnout. They aren't a big secret. Republicans can't survive by relying on incumbency, money, and attacks on Democrats. They need a positive agenda to stir the Republican base in general and conservatives in particular.

So at the top of his list is passage of a federal budget with at least minimal restraints on spending. Before the Easter recess, the House failed to pass one. Since spending curbs are important to conservatives, they'd better pass a budget soon. Republicans also need to stress the "culture of life" by noisily opposing abortion, cloning, and expanded federal subsidies for embryonic stem cell research. And they should push to make the Bush tax cuts permanent and propose serious health care legislation. If they do all this, Bush's support among Republicans should rise and so should his overall approval rating.

But what about Iraq and gas prices? Here, Bush needs help from outside events. Since early 2005, his presidency has been beset not only by Iraq and gas prices but by other outside events, including Hurricane Katrina and the Dubai ports deal. Now, a Republican official says, "it would help to have an outside situation that we could take advantage of."

A permanent, elected government in Iraq might be one, especially if it leads to fewer bombings and further reductions in American casualties by this summer. A break in gas prices is unlikely, but stranger things have happened. It would help. And Democrats may foolishly contribute by making themselves more vulnerable than ever to attacks of the type that Rove is adept at organizing.

The old football saying about winning applies to turnout in 2006. It's not everything. It's the only thing. For Bush and Republicans, turnout is destiny.

--Fred Barnes is executive editor of The Weekly Standard and author of Rebel-in-Chief (Crown Forum).

Can The New Sheriff Tame The West Wing

Time

By Mike Allen

5/1

At the George W. Bush campaign headquarters in Austin, Texas, in 1999, policy director Josh Bolten was a low-key Washingtonian in a building full of brash Texans. He assembled a best-and-brightest team with rsums bristling with brand names like his own--Princeton, Stanford, Goldman Sachs. "He used to brag that he had all these Supreme Court clerks from Harvard working for him," recalled a campaign veteran. Bolten was happy to let others preen in meetings while he waited to make a killer point at the end. He has thrived by showing, very quietly, that he is indispensable. Now as President Bush's second chief of staff, he is suddenly in the spotlight. Last week he appeared before large groups of worried aides in a White House theater, where Bush occasionally holds press conferences, to convince them that a few discomfiting changes, along with a lot of harder, smarter work, could turn around a second term that has disappointed so many of them.

"We have a thousand days to get the job done," he said, according to attendees. The rearranging of staff in the Administration, which has included moving out some loyalists from Texas and is likely to continue, reflects the President's insistence that Bolten rethink an enterprise that had a series of horrible quarters. The real deadline is not 1,000 days from now, when Bush leaves office. The marker that is uppermost in the minds of Bush's inner circle is Nov. 7, when Republicans could lose control of the House and even the Senate. "If we don't keep Congress, there won't be a legacy," said a presidential adviser. "The legacy will be investigations and fights over Executive privilege" with newly empowered Democrats.

So the White House is now on a survival footing, and Bolten is essentially planning a six-month campaign that will not only prevent a Republican hemorrhage in the fall but might even produce accomplishments for Bush in his lame-duck years. The new chief recognizes that he needs to show results quickly, since aides have claimed to be rebooting the second term so many times (at least three, by TIME's count) that even their allies have lost track. The revamps have come every few months and then been hit by unexpected crises like the uproar a proposal to let a Dubai company operate some key U.S. ports.

The new chief, who packed some of his own boxes for the move across West Executive Avenue from his old office, had been on the job just one full day when Rob Portman, the Trade ambassador and a strong communicator, was named to succeed him as director of the Office of Management and Budget. The next morning, press secretary Scott McClellan appeared on the South Lawn with Bush to announce

to reporters in a choked voice that he would leave his job in two or three weeks, a few months short of three years at the podium. McClellan, considered "family" because he had worked for Bush in the Texas Governor's office, made no effort to hide from colleagues his sadness about going early. But top Republicans were being consulted about his replacement within days after Bolten's promotion was announced, and the loyal Texan got the message. Friends said McClellan wanted to get it over with, to short-circuit the absurdity of having to refuse to speculate about his future to reporters. Bush praised McClellan for his "integrity," a pointed absolution for the fact that McClellan was left in the dark about the involvement in the CIA-leak case of White House officials he had defended. Offers from speakers' bureaus and other businesses have rolled in, and most of the week's photographs showed McClellan smiling.

Two hours after the South Lawn appearance, the White House announced that Karl Rove, whose name is synonymous with unchecked authority in this Administration, would be yielding his day-to-day policy duties. "I've been asked by the President and my new boss to focus on big strategic questions and the bigger issues," Rove told TIME. The idea, according to an aide, is for Rove to focus on "immigration, not the definition of seaward lateral boundaries." But Rove relishes his role at the nexus of policy and politics, and had dived into the governing responsibilities Bush gave him at the start of the second term. He tackled both fundamentals and minutiae, from formalizing the elaborate steps aides must take when preparing for policy time with the President to revising the official calendars handed out at Friday meetings of policy deputies so that they could record progress on topics raised at previous meetings. He even spent hours editing memos written for the President by specialists on everything from levees to student test scores.

The Democratic National Committee called the change in Rove's role a "demotion," and some insiders viewed it as a slap. "This is Josh saying there's a new sheriff in town, and there will only be one chief of staff," said a former West Wing tenant. A Bolten friend said Rove had been reined in by Bush, who realized that even Rove can do only so many people's jobs. Aides said Rove, 55, who retains his titles of senior adviser and deputy chief of staff, will move across the hall from his high-ceilinged office in the West Wing and turn it over to the new deputy chief of staff in charge of day-to-day policy, Harvard-trained wunderkind Joel Kaplan, 36, one of the former Supreme Court clerks from the Austin policy shop. Kaplan, a former Marine artillery officer who shares Bolten's boyish sense of humor, has been his deputy for the past five years. The Massachusetts native married a Texan earlier this month, with Bolten reading in English seven blessings derived from a traditional Jewish marriage ceremony.

Aides were still searching last week, according to one, for "someone with credibility with the markets" to replace Treasury Secretary John Snow, who has come to be viewed as an ineffective messenger. They are also on the hunt to replace Jim Towey, director of the President's faith-based initiative, who left saying the effort had "faced a steady headwind from Day One." At one point, say G.O.P. officials, the White House was even inquiring about a possible ambassadorship for White House counsel Harriet Miers, but Bolten issued an unusual public denunciation of reports that she would be replaced. Bolten, 51, hopes to have most of his staff changes in place within a couple of weeks, and his aides are planning a "rollout" of public appearances for him then to discuss the new structure, on the theory that news coverage of change will benefit the President.

But the musical chairs is just the first of a two-act makeover. Friends and colleagues of Bolten told TIME about an informal, five-point "recovery plan" for Bush that is aimed at pushing him up slightly in opinion polls and reassuring Republican activists, whose disaffection could cost him dearly in November. The White House has no visions of expanding the G.O.P.'s position in the midterms; the mission is just to hold on to control of Congress by playing to the base. Here is the Bolten plan:

1 DEPLOY GUNS AND BADGES. This is an unabashed play to members of the conservative base who are worried about illegal immigration. Under the banner of homeland security, the White House plans to seek more funding for an extremely visible enforcement crackdown at the Mexican border, including a beefed-up force of agents patrolling on all-terrain vehicles (ATVs). "It'll be more guys with guns and badges," said a proponent of the plan. "Think of the visuals. The President can go down and meet with the new recruits. He can go down to the border and meet with a bunch of guys and go ride around on an ATV." Bush has long insisted he wants a guest-worker program paired with stricter border enforcement, but House Republicans have balked at temporary legalization for immigrants, so the President's ambition of using the issue to make the party more welcoming to Hispanics may have to wait.

2 MAKE WALL STREET HAPPY. In an effort to curry favor with dispirited Bush backers in the investment

world, the Administration will focus on two tax measures already in the legislative pipeline--extensions of the rate cuts for stock dividends and capital gains. "We need all these financial TV shows to be talking about how great the economy is, and that only happens when their guests from Wall Street talk about it," said a presidential adviser. "This is very popular with investors, and a lot of Republicans are investors."

3 BRAG MORE. White House officials who track coverage of Bush in media markets around the country said he garnered his best publicity in months from a tour to promote enrollment in Medicare's new prescription-drug plan. So they are planning a more focused and consistent effort to talk about the program's successes after months of press reports on start-up difficulties. Bolten's plan also calls for more happy talk about the economy. With gas prices a heavy drain on Bush's popularity, his aides want to trumpet the lofty stock market and stable inflation and interest rates. They also plan to highlight any glimmer of success in Iraq, especially the formation of a new government, in an effort to balance the negative impression voters get from continued signs of an incubating civil war.

4 RECLAIM SECURITY CREDIBILITY. This is the riskiest, and potentially most consequential, element of the plan, keyed to the vow by Iran to continue its nuclear program despite the opposition of several major world powers. Presidential advisers believe that by putting pressure on Iran, Bush may be able to rehabilitate himself on national security, a core strength that has been compromised by a discouraging outlook in Iraq. "In the face of the Iranian menace, the Democrats will lose," said a Republican frequently consulted by the White House. However, a Los Angeles Times/Bloomberg poll this April 8-11, found that 54% of respondents did not trust Bush to "make the right decision about whether we should go to war with Iran."

5 COURT THE PRESS. Bolten is extremely guarded around reporters, but he knows them and, unlike some of his colleagues, is not scared of them. Administration officials said he believes the White House can work more astutely with journalists to make its case to the public, and he recognizes that the President has paid a price for the inclination of some on his staff to treat them dismissively or high-handedly. His first move, working with counselor Dan Bartlett, was to offer the press secretary job to Tony Snow of Fox News radio and television, a former newspaper editorial writer and onetime host of Fox News Sunday who served George H.W. Bush as speechwriting director. Snow, a father of three and a sax player, is the bona fide outsider that Republican allies have long prescribed for Bushworld and would bring irreverence to a place that hasn't seen a lot of fun lately. "White Houses are weird places," he told a 2004 panel on White House speechwriting. Snow had his colon removed after he was found to have cancer last year, but his doctors have approved the possibility of his taking the grueling post.

Veterans of this and other Republican White Houses said that although they believe Bolten's first corrections have helped, they have not gone deep enough, mainly because most key decision makers--including Bolten, Rove and their staffs--continue to be people who have been in the Bush bubble for six years or more. "Where's the innovation? Where's the perspective?" said a friend of Bush's, who described the staff as so insular that it is hobbled by what he calls the "white-men-can't-jump syndrome"--the inability to soar. So now Bolten must prove to his many constituencies, internal and external, that although he's a veteran of the Bush team, he can still get it off the ground.

It's Policies, Not People

Newsweek

By Robert J. Samuelson

5/1

The second-term white house shake-up is an old tradition, driven variously by scandal, exhaustion and ambition. Presidents need to be protected and reinvigorated. Scapegoats for past failures need to be dumped. The Bush administration is now undergoing this ritual. There's a new White House chief of staff. The press secretary has resigned. Karl Rove

has lost one of his two jobs. Other changes are rumored. This is, on the evidence so far, mostly a public-relations exercise.

The administration's central problem is its policies, not the people executing the policies. Some new players may outperform the old: they may call the right senator at the right time, cope better with unforeseen calamities (Katrina) or provide stronger public defenses of administration actions. But these

improvements, should they occur, cannot offset larger failings. These relate to Bush's agenda--or lack of agenda. If you're driving in the wrong direction, or not driving at all, changing chauffeurs doesn't help.

In offering this appraisal, I'm deliberately staying away from Iraq and terrorism--subjects on which I have no special insights. Instead, I'm concentrating on basic domestic policies that I know better: the budget, taxes, health care, energy policy and immigration. On all these, the nation has serious business to do. But the administration isn't doing it.

We should be preparing for aging baby boomers. Projected Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid costs could expand the federal budget by 30 percent to 40 percent by 2030. To limit these huge increases--implying much higher taxes or draconian cuts in other programs--we should gradually raise eligibility ages for Social Security and Medicare, as well as curb benefits for wealthier retirees. Instead, Bush has worsened the outlook by enacting the biggest-ever expansion of Medicare. The new drug benefit will cost \$792 billion from 2006 to 2015, estimates the Congressional Budget Office. Not surprisingly, Bush's ill-fated Social Security plan would also have increased spending.

On energy, we need a grand compromise between producers and environmentalists. We have sizable natural-gas and oil reserves in Alaska and along the offshore continental shelves. Many are now off-limits to exploration and production; they shouldn't be. But greater conservation is also imperative. In 2005, the United States had 226 million cars and trucks; by 2030, that will rise 46 percent to 330 million, projects the Energy Information Administration. Unless these vehicles become vastly more efficient, fuel demand will reach unmanageable levels. Much tougher fuel-economy standards and a higher energy tax would move us in the right direction. Bush spent four years on an energy bill that, despite some good provisions, won't substantially improve either production or conservation.

You can go down the list. Unless we control health costs, they will squeeze out other public and private spending. In 1993, health spending was 13.8 percent of national income (gross domestic product); in 2005, it was 16.2 percent of GDP. The administration promotes health savings accounts, but by its own projections, these won't help much. In 2015, health spending will hit an estimated 20 percent of GDP. Similarly, unless we curb the flow of poor immigrants, we will inexorably expand the nation's poverty rolls. Bush opposes illegal immigration (who doesn't?) but would legalize many of the same people by reclassifying them as "guest workers." The social consequences would be similar. Bush's notion that most would go home is a fantasy.

Shuffling top presidential aides can't redeem this bleak record. To be fair, all these are hard problems; none has simple solutions. But sensible policies could lessen them all. Barring a miraculous recovery of his political fortunes, Bush has largely missed his chance to provide these. The needed steps are often initially unpopular; raising gas taxes or Medicare's eligibility age wouldn't be a crowd pleaser. A popular president might take the risk. An unpopular president will be less inclined--and less likely to succeed if he does. Bush's heavy reliance on Republican congressional support creates a further obstacle. The Republicans are defecting "because they're up [for re-election], and he's not," says Norman Ornstein of the American Enterprise Institute. Meanwhile, "Democrats have zero reason to bail him out."

For this failure, Bush bears most of the blame. He equates his own short-term political interests with the nation's long-term interests. How else to explain the Medicare drug benefit, a mega-handout intended mainly to win votes among seniors? He seems to mistake stubbornness for judgment and rigidity for principle. How else to explain his obsession with tax cuts, designed to please the Republican base, without any parallel discipline on spending? The Bush mind-set produces proposals that speak to partisan preferences more than national needs. Therefore, they do not command broad public respect. Having governed from a narrow political and intellectual base at home, he has left his presidency hostage to events abroad. It is a precarious place to be.

Bush Pops His Bubble

Newsweek

By Richard Wolffe and Holly Bailey

5/1

No matter how powerful he grew inside the Bush White House, Josh Bolten always came off as just one of the guys, a smart, hardworking wonk who ducked publicity and rewarded his staff with a night at

the bowling alley. But in the two weeks since he was named the new White House chief of staff, Bolten has, in his quiet, unassuming way, created high anxiety inside the West Wing. He was hired to do an urgent but seemingly impossible job--revive the flailing administration--and he had barely moved into his new office before he began easing out loyal but timeworn aides. At a 7:30 a.m. meeting on his first day in the new job, Bolten told the senior staff, "If you're thinking about leaving sometime in the near future, now would be a good time to do it."

Bolten started at the top, going after the two highest-profile staff members inside the West Wing: Bush's Brain and Bush's Mouthpiece. Karl Rove, who stepped down as day-to-day policy coordinator, and Scott McClellan, who announced his retirement as press secretary, were by no means equals inside the administration's power structure. But they were the most visible changes Bolten could make to Team Bush, and the news put everyone else on notice, and on edge.

Some Bush aides learned about McClellan's resignation from cable TV. "Thank God for Fox News," ran one White House joke. Nervous aides, who knew Bolten wasn't done yet, began listening for random applause coming from West Wing offices, especially during senior staff meetings. "It could be a clue" that someone was headed out the door, says a White House aide who didn't want to be named talking about the new boss. "It's really weird right now," says another senior White House official who likewise asked for anonymity. "People are worried about their jobs."

They should be. Bolten--and Bush--have good reason to be unhappy with the help. The staff upheaval reflects a broader loss of confidence inside the administration. It wasn't so long ago that the White House prided itself on its discipline and effectiveness. But after a year of political blunders, scandal and increasing violence in Iraq, the president and his team seem exhausted and sapped of swagger. At the moment Bush can't get a break even when things go his way.

The economy is a case in point. For the most part, economists say it's strong, and Bush should be enjoying the credit. Instead, polls show voters believe things are still sluggish, largely because gas prices are so high. Bush may not be to blame for that, but the White House's political team hasn't come up with anything reassuring to say about the problem, or a way to fix it any time soon. That's left Americans worried--and given Democrats an opening to accuse Bush of helping his oil-industry friends get rich by gouging working people.

Likewise, Bush's White House visit with Chinese President Hu Jintao last Thursday was an opportunity for strong-leader visuals. Instead, the meeting was marked by one embarrassing, amateur-hour moment after another. A White House announcer messed up the name of the country, saying China's national anthem was "the national anthem of the Republic of China"--the formal name of China's bitter rival, Taiwan. Later, a Falun Gong protester with a press pass got through security and berated the Chinese leader for what seemed like an eternity while Bush stood, tongue-tied, waiting for the Secret Service to haul her away. When Hu mistakenly began to walk the wrong way off the dais, Bush awkwardly grabbed him by the sleeve and tugged him back.

For months, Republican leaders in Congress, fretting about trouble in November's midterm elections, had urged the president to do something to turn around his, and their, political fortunes. They worried that Bush, surrounded by compliant aides afraid to bring him bad news, was going to fritter away his second term and take them down with him. So far, GOP leaders are cautiously optimistic about Bolten's first moves. They were enthusiastic about reshuffling Rove's portfolio away from policy and back to his real talent--the hardball politics of keeping Republicans in control of Washington. "Someone finally got the memo," says a Republican leadership aide who won't be named because he wants to keep his job.

Even so, many Republicans fear that Bush may be damaged beyond repair. They worry that the staff switches, coming so late, are merely cosmetic and won't have any real effect on Iraq, the economy or anything else. "It should have happened a year ago," says a former administration official who asked for anonymity to avoid hurting his career. "I think some people thought they could just ride [the re-election] high all the way through the second term. They were oblivious to the difficulties."

Bolten's low-key, noncombative style has made his task a bit easier, especially when it came to asking the sometimes volatile Rove to surrender some of his power. Even Rove's friends say that he had taken on too much, especially in an election year when Republican prospects are dim. "Karl has more bandwidth than anyone on the planet, but with the elections coming up, we have to make sure he has the time to concentrate on the big message," says Mark McKinnon, Bush's ad maker.

Rove was the first consigliere in memory to attempt to tackle two big jobs--dispensing political advice to his boss and controlling the policy levers inside the White House. Even Rove, a famous multitasker, couldn't cope. On his watch, Bush's domestic agenda collapsed. The president's attempts to overhaul Social Security stalled, alienating congressional Republicans. As a consolation to frustrated members of Congress, the White House offered to carve its immigration policy in two--separating border security from temporary-worker visas--a ploy that has hurt the chances of passing both this year.

The policy title was supposed to be Rove's reward for his stellar performance in the 2004 election. Instead, it turned out to be a burden. Nobody knew that better than Bolten, who had held the post himself. Bolten and Rove have been close friends for years. That helped smooth what could have been an awkward situation. "Only Josh could have handled this so deftly," says the former administration official. "One wrong move and it could have been World War III."

The White House could spin the Rove move as simply letting him go back to doing what he does best, but Scott McClellan had no such excuse. The beleaguered press secretary had the misfortune of taking over the podium job in July 2003, just as the war in Iraq and the CIA leak scandal were both getting worse by the day. McClellan knew his job was a burnout position, with a normal life span of two years. By the beginning of this year, the job had lost much of its appeal. His relationships with reporters had become strained after months of tense briefing-room showdowns over the CIA investigation. But he left friends with the impression that he had no intention of leaving any time soon.

When Andy Card was pushed out as chief of staff, McClellan started to rethink his position. He walked over to see Bolten, who had quietly made it known that he didn't think McClellan was up to the job, according to a close friend of Bolten's, who asked not to be named because he wanted to stay close. McClellan told Bolten that he was feeling the wear and tear of doing battle with the press. That conversation was the beginning of the end for McClellan. "Josh isn't a guy who says 'You're fired,' unless you do something wrong," says the Bolten friend, who is also a former senior administration official. "But did I know McClellan would be gone? Oh yeah. [Bolten will] go after anything that seems like it isn't working, or isn't going to change. He is very results-oriented." (It's not yet clear who will take McClellan's place. Two names floating around Washington: Fox News's Tony Snow, who was a speechwriter for Bush's father, and Dan Senor, the former U.S. spokesman in Iraq.)

McClellan won't be the last to go. After the Big Bang of his first week, Bolten is now trying to calm rank-and-file staffers, even as he prepares to deliver more bad news. He batted down rumors that White House Counsel Harriet Miers was on the list. But Treasury Secretary John Snow, who hasn't made much of a mark in the job, is said to be in Bolten's sights. And Candida Wolff, the president's lobbyist on Capitol Hill, is also expected to pack up. But the last thing Bolten wants is to let the firings drag out, which would only cause more frayed nerves. "If you are going to do personnel changes, you want to do it quickly," says a former administration official who asked for anonymity in talking about Bolten. "You don't want this feeling like you are on the set of 'The Sopranos,' thinking, 'Who's next?' "

Rummy Punch

New Republic

By Peter Beinart

5/1

Of course George W. Bush should fire Donald Rumsfeld it's no longer an interesting debate. Even the Iraq war's most fervent supporters people like John McCain have denounced Rumsfeld's refusal to send enough troops to secure Baghdad in the aftermath of Saddam Hussein's fall. Rumsfeld's support is now concentrated among people less invested in the survival of Iraq than in the survival of Bush. And, even on the right, their numbers are dwindling fast.

The real question is whether, at this point, Rumsfeld's resignation would even make a difference. Pundits are like sports announcers: They have a professional interest in insisting that the game isn't over that some dramatic, Hail Mary play could still turn the tide. But, no matter how hard they try, at some point fans turn off the television. And the American public is reaching that point on Iraq. According to a recent Gallup Poll, 57 percent of respondents said either that the United States can't win in Iraq or that it can but won't. Majorities want to withdraw at least some troops immediately. This fall, opinion in Congress will likely catch up to opinion in America. The newly elected Democrats and

there will be lots of them will interpret their victories as mandates for rapid troop withdrawal. And, when they come to town, appropriating the money for a continued occupation will become much harder. At that point, it will hardly matter that Rumsfeld still has his job. He'll be a political undertaker. In fact, if you think there is no hope in Iraq, it's better that Bush not fire Rumsfeld. That way, Bush supporters won't be able to pawn off blame on people who took over too late to do any good. Imagine, for instance, if John Kerry had won in 2004. It's unlikely Iraq would be any better today than it is now, but it is very likely that Republicans would be blaming Kerry for the mess. Keeping Rumsfeld has the virtue of clarity. Sending him off to his New Mexico estate with a 'thanks-for-a-great-career: pat on the back, if not a presidential medal of freedom (L. Paul Bremer and George Tenet both have them) would almost be too kind. Simply serving as secretary of defense in the ugly days to come might be the worst punishment of all. But if you do think there's hope for Iraq, Rumsfeld must be fired immediately. And, since Bush presumably still does, it is amazing that he can't see the political logic staring him in the face. Bush prides himself on his loyalty. And, in certain circumstances, it is indeed admirable. One of Bush's finest moments came after he was walloped in the 2000 New Hampshire primary by John McCain, when he assembled his top advisers in a room and told them that he took all the blame, and no one would be fired. If Kerry or Al Gore had shown that kind of loyalty to the people who ran their campaigns, they might have gotten some in return and one or both might have become president. But reinforcing Bush's loyalty is a frightening intellectual parochialism and a near-pathological fear of appearing politically weak. And those less admirable qualities are blinding him to the fact that his give-no-quarter, stay-the-course, brand-the-critics-as-wusses strategy for selling the war has utterly failed. As The Washington Post's David Ignatius recently noted, Bush has been aggressively promoting his Iraq policy for months now. And the more speeches he gives, the more support drops. The public has turned off the television. If there's any chance of getting them to take a second look (absent good news from Iraq, which seems depressingly unlikely), it starts with separating the debate over what we should do now in Iraq from the debate over whether we should have invaded in the first place. There are legitimate arguments for rapid withdrawal. But the withdrawal argument has also become a way for people to emphasize their opposition to the initial decision to go to war. Opposing continued occupation like opposing the \$87 billion supplemental in 2003 has become part of a larger effort to hold the Bush administration accountable for its disastrous mistakes. The best way to disentangle the two debates would be to replace Rumsfeld with someone who opposed the war to begin with. Bush would have to invest that person with tremendous power. Ideally, his or her appointment would coincide with the dismantling of Dick Cheney's shadow national security staff thus demoting Cheney to the level of past vice presidents. And he or she should also be given the authority to replace John Bolton, which would be a useful olive branch to an enraged Congress, not to mention the rest of the planet. Finally, Rumsfeld's successor should be given the authority to reconsider all aspects of Iraq policy as Clark Clifford did when he replaced Robert McNamara late in Lyndon Johnson's presidency. (That is not to say a successor need decide about Iraq what Clifford decided about Vietnam: that it is unwinnable. Only that Clifford brought intellectual openness to a White House grown agoraphobic, which is exactly what the Bush White House has become today). My nominee would be Brent Scowcroft. I'm not a big fan of his rather amoral brand of realism. But, in Iraq today, it hardly matters. Even if Scowcroft wanted to put a pliant dictator in charge of Iraq, at this point, he couldn't. And he would bring key assets to the job. As a retired lieutenant general who also served as national security adviser, he is well positioned to repair the civil-military gulf that Rumsfeld has created. And, as a vocal war critic from the very beginning, he might win a serious hearing on Capitol Hill and from the American people. If he came out for rapid withdrawal, this goodwill would hardly be necessary; he would be running with the wind. But, if he determined that the United States should stay for a couple more years that doing so offers at least the fleeting hope that Iraq's center can hold he might prove able to bring Congress along. He might convincingly tell the American people what Rumsfeld, and Bush himself, never credibly could: that we're all in this Iraq mess together. Such an appointment, of course, is radically unlikely. It would require Bush to break out of his intellectual bubble, to put his trust in his political adversaries, to very publicly eat crow. A more creative, more honest, more confident leader might do that. And America badly needs such a leader in these grim times. Unfortunately, it has George W. Bush and likely Donald Rumsfeld, too.

ARAB MEDIA

Coming to America

New Republic

By Spencer Ackerman

It took Dave Marash about four years as a Washington anchor to become disgusted with the pandering, the triviality, and the sensationalism of TV news. Marash was a paragon of seriousness, as his bearded chin and intense eyes announced to even casual viewers of WRC-TV, Washington's local NBC affiliate, and, by 1989, he was fed up. Eight months before the FBI would discover Mayor Marion Barry smoking crack in the Vista International Hotel, Marash concluded in frustration to *The Washington Post* that scandal-mongering had created 'an infatuation with what the mayor may or may not put up his nose rather than how he spends his day the administration of his damn government, which is a shambles.: So, in June, he left WRC for arguably the most serious show in network journalism: ABC's *Nightline*.: It was a perfect match: There, Marash would spend 16 years reporting on human rights abuses in Burma, ethnic cleansing in Kosovo, and aids in Zimbabwe. 'Nightline: was a place where Marash could spotlight America's working poor in the midst of the stock market boom and conclude earnestly, 'For those near the bottom, this is a world of constantly threatening hunger and recurring poverty.: It's that sort of gravitas Marash intends to bring to his next job: Washington anchor for the new, English-~ ~language version of Al Jazeera.

It's safe to say most Americans don't exactly associate Al Jazeera with Marash's brand of journalistic integrity. If anything, they associate it with the vile demagoguery of on-air personalities like Youssef Al Qaradawi, a wizened sheik who hosts an opinion show called 'Sharia and Life,,: which he has used as a platform to defend suicide bombings against Israelis and attacks on Americans in Iraq. (To wit: ' [A]ll Iraqis should stand together in one rank to resist the occupation... Others should also help [the insurgency] with funds and weapons, in spirit through prayers, and in any way possible.:) In September, a Spanish court actually convicted one of Al Jazeera's most enterprising reporters of collaborating with Al Qaeda, and one of its cameramen has spent the last four years in Guantanamo Bay, bolstering the American perception that Al Jazeera is little more than a megaphone for Osama bin Laden. (Al Jazeera insists that its staffers have been railroaded.) That may be why, as the *Daily Mirror* reported in November, President Bush toyed with the idea of bombing Al Jazeera's Doha headquarters an accusation that would have had all the credibility of the U.K. scandal sheet that aired it, had the United States not also (accidentally, of course) bombed Al Jazeera's bureaus in Afghanistan and Iraq. So it's hardly surprising that Al Jazeera's decision to launch an English-language broadcast has been greeted in the United States with something approaching horror. In fact, although Al Jazeera International (AJI) is scheduled to begin broadcasting at the end of the spring, not a single U.S. cable or satellite provider has yet agreed to carry it. But its reporters and managers stress that the network intends to be a wholly different sort of enterprise they're not that Al Jazeera. Far from ardent sermons on the application of Islamic law in everyday life delivered by clerics in keffiyehs, Al Jazeera's international sibling plans to present a cosmopolitan, Jim Lehrer-esque vision of TV news a goal that has many of the channel's Arab loyalists feeling betrayed. Indeed, Marash doesn't see his joining AJI as a departure from his work at 'Nightline,,: but rather as an extension of it. He and his AJI colleagues 'the channel has recruited heavies like BBC eminence David Frost and Riz Khan of CNN lament the superficiality of the mainstream press and ask: When was the last time you were treated to a nuanced, lengthy broadcast on, say, Latin America?' What I'm striving for,,: Marash explains, 'is news at the speed of thought.:That might gain you plaudits at the Columbia School of Journalism, but the experiment is bound to have political fallout. The viewership that Marash describes is going to be wealthy, elite, and, in all probability, liberal. And, if liberals think they're politically marginalized now as being soft on terrorism, just imagine if they begin stuffing their latest issue of *The New York Review of Books* into a tote bag from Al Jazeera International. What happens when liberal pundits start appearing on an offshoot of what a staffer once lamented is considered 'Al Jazeera, comma, Osama bin Laden's mouthpiece, comma:? Al Jazeera's first decade has been an unbelievable success. Begun in 1996 as a nonhydrocarbon investment in the future by the young emir of Qatar, Sheik Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, the satellite channel quickly earned a reputation for airing perspectives that went far beyond what Middle Eastern information ministries considered acceptable. On chat shows like the wildly popular 'Opposite Direction,,: the predominant viewpoint is far more likely to be theocratic than liberal. But Al Jazeera created a space where Arabs could argue heatedly about their prevailing social, political, and religious order instead of having their opinions repressed. Hosni Mubarak paid the network the ultimate backhanded compliment during a tour of its cramped studios in 2000 by exclaiming, 'All this trouble from a matchbox like this!: It's estimated that Al Jazeera has as many as 50 million daily viewers in what, before it appeared on the scene, was among the most moribund media cultures on the planet. That has never been enough. As early as 1998, Al Jazeera execs began toying with the idea of going global. But it was only after September 11 made Al Jazeera the most important news organization on earth no other network had a Kabul bureau, let alone a post-attack interview with bin Laden that expanding to an English-language format appeared realistic. By

2002, many at the network had concluded that broadcasting in English was nothing less than an obligation rooted in Al Jazeera's original mission as ' the first channel in the history of broadcasting to tell the Arabic and Islamic perspective to the Western people,: as one proud London bureau staffer put it to author Hugh Miles. But expansion also became a corporate imperative: As both a media and an Arab phenomenon, Al Jazeera felt it ought to be the equal of CNN and the BBC, both of which have strong international presences. Last year, it announced the hiring of top management and news staff for an English-language spinoff and ambitiously promised to launch in 2006. As soon as planning for the new channel started, however, it became clear how brand expansion and brand integrity can pull in, well, opposite directions. Al Jazeera's mission might have dictated that AJI simply be an English language version of the original 'a translation that presented the United States and Europe with an unadulterated view of the Arab world. Indeed, many Arab journalists I spoke with at Al Jazeera's 2004 world media forum in Doha emphasized to me their desire to ' talk back: to Western media about the Middle East. Al Jazeera's then communications director, Jihad Ali Ballout, confidently promised me that ' the content will be the same: as in Arabic. But the interest of the global corporation that Al Jazeera had become was another matter. In interviews with AJI staffers and in their promotional materials 'a conspicuously recurring subject is Al Jazeera's ranking as the fifth most recognizable brand in the world. To many at Al Jazeera, the best way of growing the brand and increasing its prestige is to pursue an international audience. ' We are trying to reposition Al Jazeera as a global channel and not a pan-Arab channel,: Marketing Director Ali Mohammed Kamal told The Times of London in November 2002. ' A lot of people watch the BBC or CNN as a credible source of news. We are trying to dent this credibility and relaunch as a more international channel.:That means Al Jazeera International will bear little resemblance to its parent network. ' Al Jazeera in Arabic 'obviously it's a service by, for, and of Arabic speakers, mostly a Muslim and mostly a Middle Eastern audience. It reflects their point of view,: Marash explains from the conference room of 1627 K Street, where, on the fourth floor, AJI's studios are still under construction. ' Al Jazeera International's structure and composition is independent. In terms of staff, and editorially, we're independent from them. We're an English-language news service with a global audience 'a broader palate, a broader mandate, and a more diverse clientele.: Over the course of 24 hours, AJI will broadcast from four hubs around the world (semi-autonomous republics,: in one AJI staffer's phrase): from Kuala Lumpur for four hours, Doha for eleven, London for five, and Washington for four, according to current planning. Each hub will view the events of the day ' with the assumptions and culture of their regional bases.: For example, on the morning of our interview, The Washington Post ran a front-page story about a new poll reporting rising American hostility toward Muslims. AJI's four different hubs would present a story like that in terms of its implications for the Pacific Rim or the Persian Gulf or transatlantic unity, as well as explain the U.S. perspective, thereby aspiring to give ' a 24-hour-day kaleidoscope of views.: To the enthusiastic Marash, it's a paradigm shift: the creation of the world's first truly cosmopolitan media landscape, the town square of a global village that's open, accessible, and yet familiar to any English speaker, ' rather than Turner's God's-eye view or Murdoch's Fox/Sky national view of the world. That is the mission.:If that sounds high-minded even a little pretentious Marash and his colleagues offer no apologies. Al Jazeera's calling card is to aggressively challenge the cultural assumptions of their rivals about the Arab world. AJI's will be to challenge their competitors' intellect. ' I want to slow things down from the traditional pace of cable news and provide more depth, more nuance, more sophistication. I want to do fewer stories,: Marash says. For AJI Washington's hourlong broadcast at 7 p.m., Marash envisions up to three central stories, each reported for five to seven minutes and then amplified by expert interviews and discussion: ' It'll be news as if it mattered, to give an understanding of complex events. ... We want to slow down and intensify what we do.: Joanne Levine, the Washington bureau's executive producer for programming and a fellow ' Nightline: refugee, intends to make long-form documentaries a central aspect of AJI's Americas lineup far from the chat-show format that forms the backbone of Al Jazeera or the often superficial foreign affairs coverage offered by their Western competitors. ' We're striving for good storytelling,: she says, ' not to be deliberately provocative for a show's sake.: Levine is the rare TV journalist whose eyes widen as she promises, ' We're going to own Latin America. When was the last time you saw a good, in-depth story on Latin America, other than on [Hugo] Chavez?: Of course, the question presumes that a viewer even knows who Chavez is. But those who don't aren't really the sort AJI is interested in attracting. Nigel Parsons, AJI's Doha-based managing director, and other AJI executives have stated that their true target audience is the millions of Muslims worldwide who don't speak Arabic 'perhaps as a way of lowering expectations for AJI's U.S. performance but Marash and Levine believe that there's an unserved news audience in the United States that's lying in wait for something like AJI. What Fox News did for gun owners and evangelicals who felt culturally alienated and politically marginalized by CNN, AJI hopes to do for English professors and software developers disgusted by both networks. ' A lot of people are dissatisfied with the so-called mainstream media, and they'll sample us,: Marash predicts. Like who? ' When you're abroad, you buy and read The International Herald Tribune. Here, you read The New York Times, Washington Post, Wall Street

Journal, Financial Times. You're a regular reader of The New Republic. Probably the same itch that makes you exercise your brain on dense, serious news organs will make you watch us.:That audience is boutique, elite, and, in all likelihood, politically liberal. Marash contends that the operative factor leading a viewer to check out AJI is disgust with the press, which cuts across ideological affiliation. ' I think a lot of the Fox News audience is our audience. Anyone with a lot of dissatisfaction with the present will sample us,: if for no other reason than what Marash calls ' bear-baiting ':that is, sampling a network perceived to be anti-American in order to get offended. But, under Marash and Levine's intended direction, AJI will eschew the inflammatory Al Jazeera style for a more textured, if relatively soporific, tone. Anyone tuning in to jeer at a defense of suicide bombers is going to be disappointed. Accordingly, Hugh Miles writes in his recent biography of the network that Al Jazeera staffers consider their best opportunity in the United States to be filling ' a vacancy at the liberal end of the [media] spectrum.: Marash doesn't exactly disagree. ' We'll get some of the same audience that Air America gets,: he says. ' Left of center, but dissatisfied with the [media] status quo.:To call this a dream come true for the right might be an understatement. In 2004, Al Jazeera wasn't even allowed to hang its banner at the Democratic National Convention for fear of invoking any attack-ad-ready association between Democrats and the controversial news channel. Now, AJI risks putting both itself and the liberals who'd watch its fare or appear on its shows in an arguably more precarious cultural position: carrying all the taint of a perceived association with terrorism however groundless along with an editorial vision that's unapologetically elite and cosmopolitan. Even if AJI's quality control is as high as Marash and Levine suggest, AJI is unlikely to escape a toxic political stigma that liberals really don't want associated with them. Indeed, Marash's rarified defense of Al Jazeera proper is catnip for the right: ' [Al Jazeera's] idea is that an argument is only defeated by a better argument. Hate speech is matched with moderate views,: he enthuses. ' The real philosophy of Al Jazeera in Arabic is that the best disinfectant is sunlight. ... That's not only the right choice, but it's the traditional choice of American journalism.:That may be, but already conservatives are treating AJI's high-profile Western hires as Islamofascist sneerings. When AJI was in talks with Frost to sign him for one of its shows, Fox News's John Gibson sneered, ' That's a little like one of the royal family consorting with the [July 7 London] bombers, isn't it?: Marash, who used to work with Bill O'Reilly in local news in New York City, appeared on ' The O'Reilly Factor: in January only to have his segment premised with O'Reilly's note to viewers, ' As you may know, the television network Al Jazeera has a close-knit relationship with Al Qaeda and other Islamic terror outfits.: While Marash held his own against his former colleague O'Reilly ended by offering what passed for an olive branch: ' Maybe you can clean that place up :his AJI confederate Josh Rushing wasn't as lucky against Sean Hannity. Claiming bewilderment over how Rushing ' in good conscience could work for a network like this,: an indignant Hannity demanded Rushing affirm that ' we're the greatest country on earth.: (He did.) And, after Rushing extended an invitation to the Fox host to appear on AJI, Hannity spewed, ' I have no intention of going on Al Jazeera, period, to put American troops in jeopardy.:In short, liberals who just want to see a good, in-depth story on Latin America are in for a barrage of accusations that they share news-watching habits with Osama bin Laden. Rushing offers a good case in point. In 2003, he was a Marine lieutenant and U.S. Central Command public affairs officer responsible for handling Al Jazeera's reporters in Doha during the invasion of Iraq. Viewers of Control Room, Jehane Noujaim's 2004 documentary about Al Jazeera, saw Rushing's perspective about the network evolve from wariness to understanding to sympathy an evolution that ultimately led Rushing out of the military and into a new career with AJI. As much as Rushing believes that AJI will spur the ' dissipation of the controversial part of the brand,: during his hiring talks with Parsons, he worried that an American audience would never accept AJI's association with Al Jazeera, which would overshadow any quality journalism the new network produces. ' We were having lunch, and I said, 'You know, we should really consider just changing the name of the network. It's just such a powerful thing here in America, even if what they believe about it isn't true, rushing recalls. Rushing now says it would have been a horrible idea ' you look disingenuous, like you're trying to hide something ':but he had a point. When he appeared on ' Hannity & Colmes,: the show ran an image of him in his Marine uniform with the caption: traitor? American conservatives might consider AJI's Western hires borderline traitors. But a more genuine and vitriolic reaction against AJI has come not from those who hate Al Jazeera but from those who love it. AJI has spent months attempting to placate Westerners wary of inviting bin Laden TV into their living rooms, filling the newspapers with reassuring quotes about AJI's professionalism and gravitas. Frost told The New York Times Magazine in February, ' When viewers watch Al Jazeera International, they will be closer to watching CNN.: Westerners might react with disbelief, but, in the Arab world, quotes like Frost's have been considered AJI's dead-serious statement of intent. That, in turn, has prompted tension that AJI will jeopardize the Al Jazeera they know and trust. Even as Al Jazeera has reaped criticism in the Middle East for airing the region's dirty social and political laundry, many of its millions of viewers consider it an authentic reflection of Arab identity ' not just a TV station,: Managing Director Wadah Khanfar once told the Guardian, but ' something people are very attached to.:To them, the

prospect that AJI led by a team heavy with Westerners would reinvent the Al Jazeera brand strikes some as another example of the West besieging the Middle East. The first Al Jazeera world media forum featured Arab, South Asian, and African journalists lining up in front of the microphones in the ballroom of the InterContinental Doha to genuflect before Al Jazeera's representatives, whom they praised as paragons of an authentic Third World press. According to attendees, this year's forum, in February, was marked by anxiety over whether AJI will be just another Western news network. A new blog, Friends of Al Jazeera, has launched a relentless and often scurrilous counterattack on AJI's Western management as "mediocre people who have lied about their importance at the BBC and CNN on their CVs swanning around the Ritz," according to one recent post. The site's bloggers, who simply refer to themselves as "a group of media activists from around the world" and who didn't return my e-mails seeking comment also aren't above sliming AJI staffers as "Israel-apologists." Al Jazeera staffers may not be as caustic, but their skepticism of AJI is no less intense. "There is a widespread feeling that they are going to be Al Jazeera only in name, judging by the attitudes of some of its anchors and officials," explains one prominent Al Jazeera journalist. "Sadly, some of them give you the impression that they want to disown Al Jazeera." The dismay among Al Jazeera's Arab staff is so great that, last month, the company's chairman, Sheik Hamad bin Thamer Al Thani, tapped Khanfar to "improve integration: between the networks. (Neither Khanfar, Parsons, nor other top AJI brass granted me an interview.) Arabs aren't the only ones who want AJI to reflect Al Jazeera. In a recently published book titled *Voices of the New Arab Public*, Williams College Professor Marc Lynch argues that Al Jazeera has constructively shattered the prevailing Arab political consensus, with its freewheeling and often inflammatory guests presenting viewers every day with televised examples of how democratization can mean both deliverance and demagoguery. He traveled to Doha for the February forum and pleaded his case to Parsons directly that the world needed to see and hear the same debate that Al Jazeera frames for the Arab world. "I told Nigel, look, you can't run away from the controversy. You're Al Jazeera controversy finds you. It doesn't matter how many times you hire people like David Frost," Lynch says. Lynch would prefer something closer to a direct translation of Al Jazeera's Arabic content into English: "That would be great. It would infuriate a lot of people." After the initial shock of watching an intense septuagenarian preacher like Qaradawi deliver strict religious instructions for day-to-day living, however, Lynch anticipates a far more important secondary shock: one over "how similar the debates are to the arguments here: What does democracy mean? What is Al Qaeda?": In February, for example, a Syrian-born Californian named Wafa Sultan contended on Al Jazeera to an outraged cleric that Islam was a backward religion. A clip of the debate, subtitled in English, circulated around the Internet, attracting overwhelming praise from right-wing blogs (one wrote that Sultan "did the unthinkable: She appeared on Arab television and condemned Islam" and resulted in a front-page New York Times profile. To Lynch, however, seeing people surprised that Al Jazeera would air an incendiary exchange between a secularist and an Islamist was nothing short of bizarre that's what Al Jazeera does all the time. (Just the other day, I had exactly the same kind of experience," Lynch quipped on his blog, Abu Aardvark. I was watching TV, and I couldn't believe my eyes, and I said "wow, did you just see LeBron James dunk? A dunk! In the NBA! Can you believe it?") Such misunderstandings show that, even as the United States adopts democratization of the Middle East as a core aspect of its strategy for the war on terrorism, the people allegedly being democratized remain an abstraction, or worse. That's why, says Lynch, "even a toned-down Al Jazeera would be useful. A lot of Americans respond to fantasies of what the Arab press is. ... It's not just presenting the extremists. There's a whole world out there. Let them talk about the things that matter." That's what Marash and Levine have attempted for their entire careers, and it's why they went to AJI. Too bad they risk being viewed as cultural bloodsuckers by the Arab world, terrorist sympathizers by the American right, and a potential albatross by the American left. Marash may have escaped the sensationalism of local TV news, but he may be about to experience something much more professionally painful.

CIA LEAK

The New McCarthyism

Daily Standard

By Thomas Joscelyn

4/25

THE MEDIA has been quick to lionize Mary McCarthy, the recently fired 61-year-old CIA analyst who allegedly leaked classified information to the Washington Post's Dana Priest. According to several recent accounts, it is not clear what information McCarthy was accused of leaking. But on Sunday, the New York Times ran a tribute to McCarthy. In it we learn from a gaggle of former intelligence officials

that McCarthy is a woman of "great integrity," and "quite a good, substantive person." Larry Johnson, the former CIA analyst who told us not to worry about the threat of terrorism two years before 9/11, even tells us that she is a "sacrificial lamb."

Adulation from fellow colleagues aside, the lynchpin of the Times piece is that McCarthy has an "independent streak." She is no partisan, the Times wants you to know, and she has questioned the use of intelligence by both Democratic and Republican administrations. To demonstrate this independence, the Times piece leads with the claim that McCarthy bucked the Clinton administration in August 1998 when she objected to the destruction of a Sudanese pharmaceutical plant suspected of doubling as a front for al Qaeda's WMD efforts. The plant, named Al-Shifa, was one of two retaliatory targets chosen by the Clinton administration in the aftermath of the embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania.

But in recounting the story of al-Shifa and Mary McCarthy's role in evaluating the intelligence surrounding the facility, the Times leaves out nearly every salient fact--including evidence that the Clinton administration used to tie Saddam's Iraq to al Qaeda.

IT IS TRUE that McCarthy at first objected to the strike on al-Shifa. This was made clear in the 9-11 Commission's report (p. 117):

Two days before the embassy bombings, Clarke's staff wrote that Bin Ladin "has invested in and almost certainly has access to VX produced at a plant in Sudan." Senior State Department officials believed that they had received a similar verdict independently, though they and Clarke's staff were probably relying on the same report. Mary McCarthy, the NSC senior director responsible for intelligence programs, initially cautioned Berger that the "bottom line" was "we will need much better intelligence on this facility before we seriously consider any options." She added that the link between Bin Ladin and al Shifa was "rather uncertain at this point." Berger has told us that he thought about what might happen if the decision went against hitting al Shifa, and nerve gas was used in a New York subway two weeks later. [Emphasis Added]

The Times left out, however, that McCarthy had changed her tune by April 2000. As Daniel Benjamin, a fellow NSC staffer, wrote in 2004:

The report of the 9/11 Commission notes that the National Security staff reviewed the intelligence in April 2000 and concluded that the CIA's assessment of its intelligence on bin Laden and al-Shifa had been valid; the memo to Clinton on this was cosigned by Richard Clarke and Mary McCarthy, the NSC senior director for intelligence programs, who opposed the bombing of al-Shifa in 1998. The report also notes that in their testimony before the commission, Al Gore, Sandy Berger, George Tenet, and Richard Clarke all stood by the decision to bomb al-Shifa. [Emphasis Added]

IN ITS LIONIZATION of McCarthy, the Times did not report that she had changed her mind on al-Shifa and fallen in line with her fellow NSC staffers. Nor, did the Times report that every top Clinton administration official who was involved in the decision to strike al -Shifa stands by that decision today. Instead, the Times reports, "Clinton administration officials conceded that the hardest evidence used to justify striking the plant was a single soil sample that seemed to indicate the presence of a chemical used in making VX gas."

But, the intelligence surrounding al-Shifa was not limited to a single soil sample. Instead, the Clinton administration relied on multiple threads of intelligence, all of which pointed to Iraqi collaboration with al Qaeda in Sudan.

First, al-Shifa was not the only suspected facility in Sudan. It was merely the easiest target. As John Gannon, a former deputy director of the CIA, told THE WEEKLY STANDARD, "The consistent stream of intelligence at that time said it wasn't just al-Shifa. There were three different structures in the Sudan. There was the hiring of Iraqis. There was no question that the Iraqis were there. Some of the Clinton people seem to forget that they did make the Iraqi connection."

Second, because the attack on al-Shifa was somewhat controversial, President Clinton authorized the intelligence community to discuss this evidence with the press shortly after the strike. At the time, the Associated Press laid out this evidence in detail: The al-Shifa plant was closely tied to the Sudanese government and to Sudan's "weapons development infrastructure"; bin Laden maintained close ties to the Sudanese government even after his expulsion; "bin Laden had worked with Sudan in testing and

developing chemical weapons and was known to be seeking chemical weapons capability for the fundamentalist Islamic groups he financed"; Iraq was a customer of the plant (under a U.N. Oil-for-food contract, by the way) and, thus, had a pretext for sending "Iraqi officials who were linked to that country's chemical weapons program" to Khartoum and "help start up the plant."

But most important, we learned that "telephone intercepts collected by the National Security Agency included contacts between senior Shifa officials and Emad Al Ani, known as the father of Iraq's chemical weapons program."

SO THE STRONGEST PIECE OF EVIDENCE in the Clinton administration's hands was not "a single soil sample."

As noted previously, every former top Clinton administration still defends the decision to strike al-Shifa. Former Secretary of Defense William Cohen defended the decision in his testimony before the 9-11 Commission. Apparently referencing the NSA intercepts, Cohen testified,

There was a good reason for this confidence [in the intelligence surrounding al-Shifa] including multiple, reinforcing elements of information ranging from links that the organization that built the facility had both with bin Laden and with the leadership of the Iraqi chemical weapons program . . .

Richard Clarke defended the intelligence linking Iraqi scientists to al Qaeda in the months following the strike. The 9-11 Commission's report adds that Clarke "for years had read intelligence reports on Iraqi-Sudanese cooperation on chemical weapons." McCarthy's fellow NSC staffers Daniel Benjamin and Steven Simon give an impassioned defense of the strike on al-Shifa in their book *The Age of Sacred Terror*.

Not to mention that the CIA reported to Congress that Iraq was working on chemical and possibly biological weapons programs in Sudan every year from 1998 through 2002. The language used in 1999 was typical:

In the WMD arena, Sudan has been developing the capability to produce chemical weapons for many years. In this pursuit, it has obtained help from entities in other countries, principally Iraq. Given its history in developing CW and its close relationship with Iraq, Sudan may be interested in a BW program as well.

WHERE DOES ALL OF THAT LEAVE US? In a rather bizarre circle of logic. McCarthy's former colleagues Clarke, Benjamin, and Simon argue that: (a) the decision to strike al-Shifa was justified because (b) the intelligence connecting Iraqi chemical weapons experts to al Qaeda's chemical weapons efforts was sound, but (c) this doesn't mean that Iraq and al Qaeda had a significant relationship because (d) somehow this collaboration occurred without either party realizing that it was working with the other

All of which is to say that Mary McCarthy's cohorts on the National Security Council's staff have played games with the intelligence surrounding al-Shifa, Sudan, Iraq, and al Qaeda for years. Maybe they've all got "independent streaks."

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