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IRAN

10 Questions For Shirin Ebadi

Time

By Jeff Chu

5/15

Iranian human-rights activist Shirin Ebadi won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2003. A judge who was dismissed from the bench after the 1979 Islamic revolution, she is now a lawyer who works to promote press freedom, spotlight gender inequity and child abuse, and defend dissidents against Iran's theocratic regime. Ebadi, 58, whose memoir *Iran Awakening* is out this week, spoke with TIME's Jeff Chu about the Nobel's impact, Iran's nuclear ambitions and her daily relaxation ritual.

Has the fame that came with the Nobel helped you in Iran? No, it has not helped at all. I published my memoirs outside Iran because I knew I would not get permission inside Iran. Also, from the time I won the Nobel, the authorities have tried three times to build a case against me. At the moment I have an open case against me. I have been accused of having taken money from the U.S. to give to Akbar Ganji, a journalist who is in jail, so he would go on a hunger strike and make Iran lose face.

You write about seeing your name on a death squad's hit list. Do you feel in danger? I still receive threatening letters and e-mails. A letter I recently received accused me of working against Islam and against Iran. Instead of a signature, [the writer] taped a dead roach to the bottom of the letter.

You discuss the strength of your Muslim faith in your book. Do you have a favorite Koranic verse? There is a verse that says God swears by time. Anything you gain in life, you pay for with your time. Time is the most important thing that has been given to man. This inspires me because it reminds me how short our time here is.

Where in the Muslim world can one see your model of how women should be treated? Let me answer this in another way: nowhere in the world is there a place where women are treated as they should be. Even in America you have not had a female President, and the number of women in the Cabinet is much lower than the number of men. Women are suppressed both in Islamic countries and in the West. But the reason they are more suppressed in Islamic countries is not because of religion but because of the patriarchal culture in Eastern countries.

You write about your responsibility for all domestic aspects of your household. Unfortunately, in the East women have to accept all the responsibility at home. Many husbands still complain when their wives work outside the house. My husband has the virtue of not complaining about my job. I divide my time so I can attend to both my profession and my work at home. Also remember that I am an Iranian woman. I have learned how to be patient.

You have described yourself as stubborn. Does your husband find it exasperating to argue with you? My husband and I rarely argue. I want to tell you something interesting: I believe so strongly in equality that I have even filled my family life with it. My husband and I have two daughters. The elder looks like her mother but has chosen her father's profession--she is an engineer. My younger daughter looks like her father, but her character is like mine. For this reason she is becoming a lawyer.

So you can see we have divided our world equally. There is nothing to fight about.

What should the West do about Iran's nuclear program? I can say what it shouldn't do. It should not attack Iran militarily. People may criticize the government, but if there is a military attack on Iran, they will defend their own country.

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad seems to be using the issue to foster nationalism. A government that is in danger from the outside will take any chance to accelerate nationalism inside the country. But nuclear power is not a daily concern of the people. They want jobs, they want houses, they want health, they want more freedom.

What do you do to relax? Every night before I go to sleep, I read a novel for at least an hour. This is how I try to forget the aggressive work of the day. Right now I am reading *The Zahir* by Paulo Coelho. I like the way Coelho looks at world issues.

What else do you think the West needs to know about Iran? The West should realize that more than 65% of our university students are women. The West should understand that Iran has more than 2,500 years of civilization. The West should know that there are thousands of women like Shirin Ebadi.

Time Bomb

National Review

By James S. Robbins

5/16

Is Iran closer to testing a nuclear weapon than we think? Last week officials from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) revealed that samples of machinery taken from a former Iranian research center showed traces of weapons-grade uranium. On Sunday, Tehran rejected out of hand a package of incentives offered by the EU in exchange for Iran halting its enrichment of uranium. But intelligence agencies have assured us that Iran is years from testing a nuclear weapon. The latest publicly known estimate is that they are about a decade off. So nothing to worry about yet, right?

Consider the track record of these estimates. When have they ever been correct? Usually when a country tests a nuclear weapon, the event shocks the world. This was true of India in 1974 and Pakistan in 1998. As well with China--an August 1964 National Intelligence Estimate of the chances of a Chinese nuclear detonation noted that a test site was being prepared at Lop Nor, and would be ready in two months. However, the CIA stated that the Chinese would not have the necessary fissionable material to finish a bomb, so they doubted anything would happen for the rest of the year. Sure enough, two months later, on October 16, 1964, the Chinese successfully tested a nuclear weapon. Something to keep in mind when the "lack of fissionable material" argument comes up with respect to Iran.

The most noteworthy failed atomic forecast was the Soviet case. The CIA's Office of Reports and Estimates (ORE) was given the task of making this prediction. ORE's earliest analysis, in 1946, saw the Soviet bomb coming sometime in the 1950-1953 timeframe. Over a series of subsequent reports, the ORE settled on mid-1953 as "the most probable date" for a Soviet nuclear test. This estimate was published August

24, 1949; five days later, the Soviets tested their first a-bomb.

One reported diplomatic response to the Soviet atomic test was the belief that since Moscow had the bomb the Communists would not feel as threatened and would be more willing to seek agreements to limit nuclear power. I am sure we will hear that kind of nonsense about Iran too, if we have not already--that possessing nuclear weapons will give them the sense of security they need to act as arbiter of peace and stability in the Middle East. However, the Soviet atomic test was the start of the most dangerous and expensive arms race in history.

Analysts who make these estimates look at a variety of factors, focusing chiefly on the known physical capacity to produce such weapons. Quantifiable variables such as these adapt well to creating timelines. Take the amount of fissile material needed to have a weapon, divide by the estimated rate of production (based on the number of reactors, for example), and you have a timeline. However, Iran's supposed material constraints may not be as important as the intent of the regime to acquire the weapons. Highly motivated countries that devote their national energies to projects of this type tend to find ways to get them done.

Case in point: The United States went from no nuclear weapons--that is, no nuclear weapons in all of human history--to the Trinity test at Alamogordo, New Mexico, in about four years. It is hard to believe that today, with the widespread knowledge of nuclear theory; 60 years of experience with nuclear weapons in various countries around the world; the availability of former Soviet scientists and technology; the assistance of rogue states like North Korea; underground networks of the type put together by A. Q. Khan to build Pakistan's nuclear weapon; the incredible surplus wealth being pumped into Iran daily due to inflated oil prices; and a highly motivated regime that seeks to develop nuclear capability as soon as possible--it is hard to believe that it would take Iran a decade to obtain a nuclear weapon.

Maybe in this case my analytical method can be summed up as common sense, but given the experts' record of accomplishment we should admit there are things we cannot know, and plan for the worst case. It is risky business basing critical policy decisions on timelines that are certain to be wrong.

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Our New Pen Pal

Newsweek
By Michael Hirsh
5/22

Americans and Iranians don't talk to each other--officially, anyway. Apart from a furtive arms-for-hostages deal in the Reagan era, the two sides haven't sat down since Ayatollah Khomeini incited his youthful Islamist radicals in Tehran--among them Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the current president--to confront the Great Satan in 1979. So the question arises: what was Mohammad Nahavandian, a close adviser to Iran's top nuclear negotiator, doing wandering around Washington last month? U.S.

authorities say they had nothing to do with his visit. In fact, they claimed to be a bit shocked to learn that Nahavandian had a green card entitling him to enter and leave the United States freely. Nahavandian himself, who had taught economics at George Washington University before he joined the government in Tehran, said he was here on private business, including showing his son some sights of America, according to U.S.-based Iranians who met him.

But that's not the whole story. During his several-week-long visit, Nahavandian briefed Iran's ambassador to the United Nations in New York, Javad Zarif. He also held a meeting with officials of the International Crisis Group, a Washington-based activist organization that recently proposed a way out of the U.S.-Iranian nuclear impasse. Its compromise plan: to acknowledge Iran's right to enrich small amounts of uranium, but to freeze the program for three years and place Iranian facilities under a tough international inspections regime. At a luncheon, Nahavandian made a passionate case to the group's Middle East director, former Clinton administration official Robert Malley, that current Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei was eager to broaden Tehran's tentative cooperation with Washington over Iraq to other subjects. Ideally that would lead to a "grand bargain" addressing all bilateral issues, including nuclear, trade and security. One participant who did not want to be identified because it might harm his relations with Tehran said that Nahavandian was clearly "putting out feelers."

Iranian President Ahmadinejad is, too, in what appears to be a struggle among Tehran's power elite to outdo each other diplomatically. The Iranian leader--who alternates between frightening, apocalyptic rhetoric at home and good-will tours abroad--sent a rambling 18-page letter to President George W. Bush last week. While the letter took a harsh, lecturing tone toward American power, it also represented the first leader-to-leader message between Tehran and Washington since the 1979 revolution. "We can see that Iranian officials are determined to talk to the U.S. directly," says Saeid Shariati, the spokesman for Iran's reformist Participation Front Party. "Now we have to wait for signals from the other side."

So far Bush's hard-line stance hasn't changed: no one-on-one talks, period. Instead, Washington is still subcontracting Iran diplomacy to Britain, France and Germany. But as the diplomatic impasse continues, and Pentagon officials voice misgivings about future military options, the administration's firm line may be wavering. The chief U.S. negotiator, Under Secretary of State Nicholas Burns, has indicated to colleagues that he is mainly waiting for the right moment, when America's leverage and its chances of success are maximized. "Whereas in recent months the U.S. response was 'It's impossible to do direct talks,' now the refusals from Washington are not so unequivocal," says a senior European envoy who works with Washington and wants to remain anonymous because of diplomatic sensitivities.

After finding itself isolated over Iraq, the United States aims to avoid further isolation in the standoff with Iran. The Bush administration is seeking to appease its own partners, especially German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, who has argued publicly that only Washington can break the impasse with Tehran. Bush may be feeling a bit chastened, too, by a new balkiness within his own military. The preparation and updating of U.S. target lists for Iran continues, but according to two officials who spoke anonymously because they are not authorized to brief the media, the Pentagon brass has told Bush that the military is pessimistic about the efficacy of airstrikes against Iranian sites.

Even Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld seems apprehensive. Last week, when asked if faulty intelligence about Iraq made him question what he knew of Iran's nuclear program, he responded, "You bet." Rumsfeld also called Sen. John Warner, chairman of the Armed Services Committee, and asked him to avoid hearings that would play up the military options. (Warner responded that he wasn't planning them, his spokesman John Ulliyot said.) Military officers say they are concerned that the Iranian nuclear program is already so widely spread out that strikes would set it back only partially, and the Iranians could retaliate in any number of places: Iraq, Afghanistan, the gulf, southern Lebanon (against Israel) and through terrorist acts in the West.

Critics like Flynt Leverett, a former Bush administration official, say that prolonging the diplomatic stalemate means that Tehran will end up closer to a nuclear bomb in the end. Leverett says Bush rebuffed an initiative from Tehran in 2003, passed on by the Swiss, to launch direct talks. "If we had pursued this three years ago and been able to work out a deal, the Iranians wouldn't have 164 centrifuges today," says Leverett. "Now if we do a deal with them we're probably going to have to accept centrifuges and some kind of small-scale enrichment activity. If we wait three years from now, who knows what the bottom line will be?" Only talking may tell.

Eyes Wide Open

Weekly Standard

By Dan Darling

5/23

AS THE IRAN DEBATE has progressed, a somewhat disturbing trend has emerged in which those who have previously warned of the dangers posed by Tehran have now sought to ignore or downplay these earlier statements. Perhaps this is because they are fearful of the prospect of a military confrontation with Iran and do not wish to be seen as supplying anything resembling a *casus belli*. This is essentially the reverse of what the Bush administration is accused of doing during the run-up to the war in Iraq, with information being presented selectively for the purpose of downplaying the Iranian threat. This seems unwise.

An honest assessment of the Iranian threat is necessary, beginning with the Iranian regime's role in the events leading up to September 11. According to the text of the 9/11 Commission report:

Khallad and other detainees have described the willingness of Iranian officials to facilitate the travel of al Qaeda members through Iran, on their way to and from Afghanistan . . . Such arrangements were particularly beneficial to Saudi members of al Qaeda.

. . . In October 2000, a senior operative of Hezbollah visited Saudi Arabia to coordinate activities there. He also planned to assist individuals in Saudi Arabia in traveling to Iran during November. A top Hezbollah commander and Saudi Hezbollah contacts were involved.

. . . In November, Ahmed al Ghamdi flew to Beirut, traveling--perhaps by coincidence--on the same flight as a senior Hezbollah operative. Also in November, Salem al Hazmi apparently flew from Saudi Arabia to Beirut.

In mid-November, we believe, three of the future muscle hijackers, Wail al Shehri, Waleed al Shehri, and Ahmed al Nami . . . traveled in a group from Saudi Arabia to Beirut and then onward to Iran. An associate of a senior Hezbollah operative was on the same flight that took the future hijackers to Iran. Hezbollah officials in Beirut and Iran were expecting the arrival of a group during the same time period. The travel of this group was important enough to merit the attention of senior figures in Hezbollah.

. . . In sum, there is strong evidence that Iran facilitated the transit of senior al Qaeda members into and out of Afghanistan before 9/11, and that some of these were future 9/11 hijackers. There is also circumstantial evidence that senior Hezbollah operatives were closely tracking the travel of some of these future muscle hijackers into Iran in November 2000.

The Commission's final report noted that it had found "no evidence that Iran or Hezbollah was aware of the planning for what later became the 9/11 attack," but closed that section of the report by stating that, "We believe this topic requires further investigation by the U.S. government"--a position which was also taken by the Commission's co-chairs, Thomas Kean and Lee Hamilton, in interviews following the publication of the final report. Kean said that "We know of a relationship [between Iran and al Qaeda]; how deep that relationship is . . . that's really going to require more research." Hamilton agreed, saying that the relationship "really does need more investigation."

Unfortunately, with the exception of then-Interim CIA director John McLaughlin's repeated assertions that there was "no evidence that there is some sort of official connection between Iran and September 11," (a claim made nowhere in the Commission report) there appears to have been little progress made by the U.S. intelligence community in learning more about the information brought to light by the 9/11 Commission report. Indeed, to the extent that the 9/11 Commission's findings have been invoked, they have been done in order to "debunk" claims of ties between the former Iraqi regime and al Qaeda, rather than to illuminate ongoing ties between the terror network and Iran.

The status of (or the willingness to conduct) the investigation into the information unearthed by the 9/11 Commission is extremely relevant to the current Iran debate. If Iran, or its Hezbollah proxies, are shown to have assisted the transit al Qaeda members whose numbers included the future 9/11 hijackers--under what appear to be extremely curious circumstances--shouldn't those facts be included in discussions over how to deal with Iran?

The issue of al Qaeda ties to Iran are not simply a matter of historical interest. In March 2006, U.S. intelligence officials told the Los Angeles Times that they believed that "the Iranian regime is playing host to much of Al Qaeda's remaining brain trust and allowing the senior operatives freedom to communicate and help plan the terrorist network's operations." Another U.S. intelligence official was quoted in the same article as being far more skeptical, but noted that "the relationship between Tehran and Al Qaeda officials within Iran was largely unknown to U.S. and allied intelligence, especially since Ahmadinejad's election last summer."

Whether the United States is planning to fight or talk with Iran, it might be a good idea to know more about the nature of that relationship.

Dan Darling is a counterterrorism consultant.

Who's Really Afraid of Iran?

Weekly Standard

By Lee Smith

5/29

U.S. MIDDLE EAST policy is undergoing an identity crisis. The giddy days of roll-back seem like a distant memory now, as a president who staked his historical legacy on Arab democracy grants Gamal Mubarak an audience at the White House while his father's government is beating and arresting protesters in the streets of Cairo. Is regional transformation rolling up its tent? Have all the sticks turned into carrots? And why is Washington so thrilled at reestablishing full diplomatic relations with Libya? If it is to illustrate what benefits are in store for another prominent power in the region should it abandon its own nuclear program, then maybe there should also be a counterexample of what happens to dangerously intransigent Middle Eastern regimes. Because Iran is looking increasingly unimpressed by the posture of the Bush White House.

The White House has pointedly explained that Iran's nuclear program is a threat to Israel, but Tehran is perhaps a more pressing problem for Gulf Cooperation Council members Oman, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, and especially Saudi Arabia. Speculations by Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad about post-Zionist geography are alarming, to say the least, but Israel has a nuclear deterrent. The Gulf countries, which in the past have shown neither the ability nor desire to protect themselves, depend entirely on the United States for their security.

And that's why Washington isn't talking much about Gulf state concerns: to avoid putting an important ally in an awkward position. The U.S. security umbrella has in the past caused blowback in the Gulf. Remember that the presence of American troops in the land of the two holy shrines compromised the legitimacy of the Saudi royal family and rallied supporters to Osama bin Laden's cause. Thus the Gulf states themselves have been almost silent on Iran's nuclear program. "Some people are praying that the United States can stop Iran but won't say so publicly," says Tareq al-Homayed, editor-in-chief of the pan-Arab London-based daily Asharq Al-Awsat. "They don't want to be seen as acting alongside the United States."

"Iran has conducted an effective 'public diplomacy' campaign," says Emile el-Hokayem, a Middle East analyst at the Henry L. Stimson Center in Washington, who has just returned from Tehran. "Arab populations are fertile ground for Iran's anti-U.S., anti-Israel propaganda [and accept] Iran's arguments about Israel, imperialism, U.S. hegemonic ambitions, and distaste for an Islamic nuclear power."

In other words, the nuclear program is just a part of Tehran's larger game. With Saddam gone, there is an opening for someone to wage the fight for the liberation of Jerusalem and hold high the burning banner of anti-Americanism. The fact that a Persian, Shiite state is doing the dirty work of mainstream Sunni Arabism is hugely discomfiting to Arab regimes. Egypt's Hosni Mubarak was only the most recent Sunni Arab ruler to vent his grief in sectarian terms, when he told an Arab TV audience last month, "Most of the Shias are loyal to Iran, and not to the countries

they are living in."

No doubt the rulers of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Kuwait consider their large number of Shia subjects a potential fifth column, but for the president of Egypt, where the Shia population is negligible, to believe as much indicates the high level of anxiety throughout the region. The longer-term strategic threat the Iranian nuclear program represents is that if the Islamic Republic gets the bomb, others will want one too, including perhaps Egypt. And if large black holes start to appear in a military budget that is mostly transparent thanks to an annual \$1.3 billion in U.S. military aid, then a part of the Middle East that has been relatively peaceful for the last 30 years may heat up again.

"The Arab-Israeli zone is actually stable compared with the Gulf," says Martin Kramer, a fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. "There is a Pax Americana around Israel that binds the state actors. But the United States is undermining the order it worked decades to create by advocating the empowerment of nonstate actors--the most prominent of which are Islamists."

First, Hezbollah became part of the Lebanese government, and then Hamas became the entire government of the Palestinian Authority. For the time being, then, the "peace process" is finished, a sea change in U.S. policy that would be hard to overstate. The peace process not only established the Pax Americana, it also neutralized a weapon, the Palestinian groups, that the radical regimes had used against the Gulf states and Jordan. Even if Syria had not recently been accused of arming Hamas militants to carry out operations against Jordan, the current situation would still look a lot like the pre-1973 Middle East.

The Iranians have essentially taken a page out of the modern Middle East political playbook, where the adventurist regimes try to undermine their rivals by espousing and funding radical causes. Ahmadinejad is the new Nasser, and there's no reason to think the Iranians can't bluff themselves into a disastrous war with Israel just as Nasser's Egypt did in 1967 (he also wanted to dominate the Gulf). Ahmadinejad's ascendance and rhetorical flourishes have effectively driven a wedge between the Gulf states, which are terrified of him, and the radicals of the Mashreq region--Syria, Lebanon, and the Palestinian Authority--where ordinary Arabs are delighting yet again in visions of an anti-Zionist apocalypse, even one that threatens their own existence. It is telling that many regional analysts think Hezbollah's arsenal of rockets constitutes a deterrent against any Israeli attack on Iran, apparently without recalling that the Egyptian air force was destroyed on the ground as the opening move of the 1967 war.

Pressure on Syria would be a logical move to counter Iran. Damascus, says Tony Badran, research fellow at the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, is not only "Iran's central client-proxy, but has also played the mediator between [Iran] and the Gulf states." The Syrian foreign minister recently visited Kuwait with reassurances from Tehran about "the peaceful nature of the Iranian nuclear program."

For the Syrians, such a role amounts to playing both sides of the street. The Gulf states may assume that in the end Syrian president Bashar Assad will have no choice but to return to the Sunni Arab fold: With a 70 percent Sunni Arab majority, the minority Alawite regime presumably cannot afford to stand with the Iranians at crunch time. Maybe that's true. Certainly it's true that the Saudis do not want

another neighboring regime changed, and the consequent chaos spreading out from Damascus. However, what the Gulf Cooperation Council wants or believes is beside the point, because in the end it is Washington that is going to be held responsible by everyone.

The final U.N. investigation report into the assassination of former Lebanese prime minister Rafik Hariri is due next month, and if it implicates key figures in the Syrian regime, then the Syrians will heat things up across the region, which will suit Iran's aims as well; if it does not single out members of the ruling clique, it will show that there is no price to pay for malfeasance.

From the beginning of the investigation, there was no obvious mechanism for putting Syrian suspects behind bars, and there is none now. So Damascus may be right to believe it can safely wait out the Bush presidency, which is back on its heels anyway. It is Syria that all of the most radical elements in the region, especially the Iranians, are watching. More and more, they seem to be coming to the same conclusion as Ahmadinejad: So that is how you talk to the Americans. Defy them.

Lee Smith, a Hudson Institute visiting fellow based in Beirut, is writing a book on Arab culture.

Don't Hold Your Breath

New Republic

By Vali Nasr

6/5

Vali Nasr is a professor at the Naval Postgraduate School and an adjunct senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations. He is the author of *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts Within Islam Will Shape the Future* (Norton) and co-author of *Democracy in Iran: History and the Quest for Liberty* (Oxford University Press).

Iran Awakening: A Memoir of Revolution and Hope

By Shirin Ebadi and Azadeh Moaveni

(Random House, 232 pp., \$24.95)

Since the Nobel Prize committee recognized Shirin Ebadi's tireless efforts on behalf of Iranian women, children, and political dissidents, she has become the international face of Iran's struggle for democracy. A judge during the Shah's time, Ebadi found herself, like many other women of her generation, pushed to the margins by the revolution's turbaned rulers. She became a lawyer and a human rights activist, building a career solely devoted to unmasking the absurdities of Iran's theocracy and fighting its archaic laws, violations of women's rights, and mistreatment of dissidents. All this is chronicled in her memoir. The book is a powerful condemnation of the dictatorship of the ayatollahs, at its best when it recounts the suffering of those whom Ebadi represented. The gross injustices and the everyday cruelties of the Islamist regime in Iran would be comical were they not so tragic.

But the narrative loses its poignancy when it shifts to the writer herself. As commendable as her efforts on the part of the victims of injustice in Iran have been,

Ebadi's confused rendition of Iranian history, which vacillates between celebrating the revolution and condemning its consequences, makes it difficult to regard her as a symbol of democracy. Still, it is possible to look beyond her perplexing tentativeness and regard her story as emblematic of the paradox of a revolution that mobilized, educated, and ultimately frustrated Iranian women. Revolutionary fervor promised to break down traditional patriarchy, but in its place there appeared new discriminations. Ebadi hopes that the unfulfilled promises of revolution will finally bring a fury down upon the Islamic Republic and fracture its pious edifice. But this hope, however fond, is a distant one--more distant than Ebadi seems to understand.

To point out that the Islamic Republic falls grossly short of Iranians' expectations is to belabor the obvious. To a moderately informed reader, the tales of woe in Ebadi's book will seem nearly as predictable as they are horrid. Less obvious is a deeply troubling question that lurks in the background. What led Ebadi and her generation of educated Westernized professionals to get themselves into this bind, to be "hypnotized" by the ayatollah's revolution? Why were their rights and their freedoms so cheap in their eyes that they so hastily traded them for the will-o'-the-wisp promise of a revolutionary utopia? "I'd rather be a free Iranian than an enslaved attorney," she cavalierly told a baffled judge who reminded her that the revolution she was championing would destroy her career. What accounts for the tragic mistake of her generation, for the grand delusion that subjected the Iranian people to the ignominy of discrimination and tyranny?

Even now, some twenty-seven years after the Iranian revolution, Ebadi displays more acrimony toward the regime that recognized her rights and made her a judge, I mean the Shah's regime, than for the one that has stripped her of those rights, ended her career on the bench, executed her brother-in-law, and put her in prison. "I had reclaimed a dignity," she fondly recalls about her euphoria on the day of the revolution, one that she "had not even realized [she] had lost." She condemns theocracy, to be sure; but she remains enamored of the revolution that brought it into being. She shows empathy for its makers, even for violent terror groups such as the Mojahedin-e Khalgh Organization, whose history is soaked in blood. How can those who speak for democracy also continue to idealize an anti-democratic revolution? Perhaps this is part of the Iranian problem.

Reading Ebadi's story, one wants to think of Mandela or Havel, except that there is no happy democratic ending to her tale. Three-quarters of the way through the book, she notes plaintively: "I am often asked, Why do Iranian young people simply not rise up? If their discontent is so deep, their alienation so irreversible, if they are 70 percent of Iranian society, what explains their complacency?" It is a good question. Indeed, it is now the question on everyone's mind. Why have the youth, not to say the broader freedom-loving population, not charged the barricades in Tehran? And in the time since Ebadi wrote her memoir, such a charge has become even less likely. In the presidential election in 2005, which was supposed to have energized pro-democracy voices and isolated the clerical regime, a clear majority of Iranians voted for Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, a favorite son of the fanatical paramilitaries. Stepping beyond Ebadi's message of hope, then, it is fair to ask whether her tale of woe and horror, of courage and youthful rebellion against tyranny, really explains Iran today.

For close to a decade now, Iran has been tantalizing and baffling the West. No other country in the region is so close to and so far from democracy. With its youthful, literate, and Web-happy population, with thousands of activist NGOs, with more women in universities than men, and with a measure of cultural dynamism that is

unique in the Middle East, Iranian society has stood in sharp contrast to the clerical leadership that is suppressing it. Persian is today, after English and Mandarin Chinese, the third most popular language online, where one can surf tens of thousands of Iranian blogs. Offline, hundreds of widely read newspapers, magazines, and periodicals host thinly disguised intellectual and political debates. Iranians also get their news and views from a myriad of international sources. The BBC's Persian website at one point received 450,000 hits a day. On satellite television, Iranians watch everything from CNN to The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer.

There are lively discussions about Western thought. Full-page debates over postmodernism often adorn the pages of popular dailies, while seminars and lectures regularly discuss Western thinkers from Hegel to Samuel P. Huntington. Iran's spirited book market has for many years now dwarfed the oft-repeated statistics showing the paltry quantity of translations in the far larger Arab world. Foreign tomes that seem as if they might be helpful in prying open Islamic orthodoxy are particularly popular. There have been more translations of Kant into Persian in the past decade than into any other language, and these have gone into multiple printings. (One is by the current conservative speaker of the Iranian parliament.) In some areas of mathematics and physics, such as string theory, Iranian research centers rank among the best in the world. Iranian cinema has in recent years become a powerful force at home and abroad.

What this dynamism signals is that the revolution is over. Such a conclusion is inescapable. But it is not all that one needs to know. It does not follow that this new cultural energy will lead to a new political energy. The expectation that a democratic opening must follow this cultural revival has turned to disappointment. Iran's youthful cultural dynamism has not only failed to produce democracy; it has failed even to produce a credible pro-democracy movement.

In truth, Iran has been an improbable candidate for a flowering of democracy. The Islamic Revolution of 1979 created the only Islamist state to result from a successful Islamic-fundamentalist drive for power. An idealized Islamic order enforced by an all-powerful state was the point of this revolution. Democracy had nothing to do with it, not even rhetorically. Still, in the quarter-century since Khomeini came to power there has been significant progress toward democracy, permitted (and manipulated) by a regime hungry for legitimacy as revolutionary zeal has drained away like water from a cracked pool. Iranians have embraced many democratic practices, participated in elections at local and national levels, and believed that their votes affect political outcomes. In 1997 a reformist cleric, Mohammad Khatami, won the election in a landslide after the unelected Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei openly endorsed Khatami's conservative opponent. Iran is the only country in the Middle East where two heads of state have stepped down after the ends of regular terms and retired undisturbed to their homes.

Since the Shah fell in 1979, there have been nine presidential elections and seven parliamentary elections. While clerical rulers vet candidates strictly and shut out thousands of them, citizens take the campaigning and the voting seriously. The voting age is fifteen. An entire generation has now grown up with ballots and promises from politicians, with the lofty ideals of democracy as well as its more mundane mechanics. It is not uncommon for far-flung villages to have elected councils. The deep flaws in the process have not prevented Iranians from learning about democratic practices and internalizing democracy-friendly values.

Ironically, this tendency is strongest among the poor and pious masses, who form the clerical regime's broadest base of support. These plain folk have always taken elections seriously, rallied and voted enthusiastically, and accepted the legitimacy of their results without question. So Iran is not saddled with the problem of democratic practices hitting the impenetrable rock of traditional values. The Iranian constitution vests sovereignty in God, but Iranian politicians look to the people for their mandate. Even the conservative wave that recently swept the hard-line Ahmadinejad to power relied on the ballot box. The problem is not with the embrace of democratic practices, but with their full and effective enshrinement in politics.

Iran had a democratic opening of sorts with Khatami's first election, by a 70 percent majority, in 1997. People expected that their electoral rejection of the dour senior clerics and their war with the world would make civil society, people power, and cultural opening the hallmarks of the future. Khatami, with his talk of "the dialogue of civilizations," the rule of law, and the status of women, seemed to be the man for the hour. After all, citizens had been able to vote for a reform candidate against the wishes of the top clerics--and the result had stood. This emboldened the forces of Iranian civil society to demand fundamental changes. And this led to a short-lived "Tehran Spring," as Ebadi puts it, during which the language and the style of politics began to change. By 1998, there were 740 newspapers in circulation, and political debate became rampant, and revolutionary dogma was openly challenged by calls for intellectual and artistic freedoms. The demand for change even extended to clerics such as Ayatollah Hossein-Ali Montazeri, Khomeini's onetime heir apparent, and to his student Mohsen Kadivar, who openly criticized the Islamic Republic's authoritarianism and spoke of reconciling Islam with democracy.

But Khatami failed to live up to expectations. He spoke of democracy, but he did little to implement it. His emphasis on the rule of law in the absence of constitutional reforms had the effect of tightening the grip of the country's unelected clerical rulers, who used the judiciary and the appointed Guardian Council-- as well as allies in the media, parliament, and various government agencies--to stiff-arm reform. The ineffectual Khatami repeatedly lost ground on press freedom, the rule of law, individual rights, and other matters. During his eight disappointing years in office, the Guardian Council blocked fully one-third of Khatami's legislative agenda.

Nor was the regime afraid to break heads. In 1999, in Iran's version of the Tiananmen Square massacre, the security forces, along with shadowy paramilitaries such as the Basij militia, brutally suppressed pro-democracy student demonstrations. During violent attacks on university dormitories and later on street marches, several students were killed and many more were injured. The attack was a turning point. Khatami faced a choice: he could call for an end to dictatorship and stand with his followers in the streets, like Boris Yeltsin atop a tank in Moscow in 1991, or he could back down. He chose the latter course, chastising the students for breaking the law and telling them to go home. Thus the march toward democracy became bogged down in a losing war of attrition with Iran's wily, ruthless, and stubborn clerical rulers.

Looking back on those years of hope giving way to despair, it is possible to conclude that perhaps most observers of Iran got it wrong. Reform was not the only game in Khatami's town, and an enthusiastic pro-democracy movement was not fated to take charge of Iran's future. In the end, the Khatami era proved to be less about democracy than about a surging wave of reaction. The ruling clergy read Khatami's victory as a warning that Iran was moving on a course which, left unchecked, would

destroy the Islamic Republic. They launched an effective counter-mobilization, taking the battle to the reformists, beating them soundly, and emerging from the struggle stronger and more confident.

This is the Iranian regime that we are dealing with today. When, in 2003, students demonstrated to mark the anniversary of their 1999 rising, they found scant enthusiasm for taking on the regime and its brute force. A year later, when reformist parliamentarians protested the Guardian Council's banning of 3,600 candidates (including eighty incumbents) in advance of the parliamentary elections, hardly any demonstrators showed up. Few heeded the then-jailed dissident Akbar Ganji's call for a boycott of the presidential elections in 2005, and no more than a handful could be found holding a vigil outside the notorious Evin prison during Ganji's much-publicized hunger strike. Ganji's bold challenge to theocracy is popular, but few are willing to accept the risks of protesting for it. The undercurrent of desire for democracy remains strong, but the democracy movement is a fizzle.

A visitor to Tehran can easily find parties where alcohol (and drugs) flow freely, and where young men and women mix without regard for draconian morality laws. But fun-loving kids eager to explore the extremes of hedonism and social freedoms do not make heroes. They are a far cry from their elders, who a generation ago challenged the Shah with a brazen idealism gleaned from Mao's little red book. The youngsters who braved the Shah's army were revolutionaries in the true sense, willing to risk all for a utopian ideal. Iranians today seem to want regime change, but at no cost. They value freedom, but they value stability more.

More confusingly, freedom, of a sort and up to a point, is something that the regime is willing to grant them. As the election in 2005 drew near, leading conservative contenders began promising greater cultural freedom but no political reform. Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, the ex-president and billionaire oligarch, and Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, the Revolutionary Guard general and student-suppressing police commander, re-invented themselves as moderate and pragmatic strongmen willing to tolerate a modest cultural opening while safeguarding social and political stability. These Putin-like figures adopted secular and youthful themes and ornamented their campaigns with pop music and stylish dress. Ghalibaf's transformation was particularly jarring. He traded his uniform for a suede jacket, hip glasses, and a beard trimmed down to Armani-style fuzz. Rafsanjani and Ghalibaf made headway into the reformist base of support, but they failed to win the big prize.

Iran's youth--30 percent of the country's population is between fifteen and twenty-nine years of age--is not a monolith. Not all are driven by the desire for looser mores. Vast numbers need jobs that an economy ravaged by revolution, war, and a crushingly bloated public sector cannot give them. Since Khomeini's death in 1989, Iran has tried to reform its economy by investing in infrastructure and pursuing privatization. Many among the elite, but also the middle class, have benefited from this change--but not so the legions of the poor and unemployed. Iran still has unemployment of close to 20 percent. The income per capita is a quarter of what it was in 1979, and on average Iranians eat less protein than they did before the revolution.

Greater room for entrepreneurship (and a measure of corruption) has energized the private sector. The newly rich, clerics and businessmen alike, quickly changed the dour face of revolutionary Iran with conspicuous consumption and an appetite for things Western. Khomeini-style austerity became a thing of the past. But beneath

the glitz there remained the frustrations of the poor, by some accounts as many as 40 percent of the population. While the affluent may have turned their attention to political freedoms, those who felt left behind amid the economic reforms nursed resentment at the growing economic disparities, and also at the cultural freedoms that they associated with the wealth at the top. This anger would lend itself to the anti-reform backlash and decide the presidential elections of 2005.

The clerical rulers grasped the social dynamics of the 1990s better than the reformists did. The regime understood that the multitude of Iranian poor wanted not freedoms but jobs. Economic reform, and not political reform, would therefore be the key. Senior officials began to talk of a Chinese model: economic restructuring to generate growth, but not political change. And so the Islamic Republic overnight became development-oriented. When the conservative establishment formed a political party to contest the parliamentary elections in 2004, it was called the Developers' Coalition. More astute elements in the regime saw development as a still-distant goal, one that would for a time widen rather than narrow the gap between rich and poor. They saw a quick fix in manipulating the anger of the poor against the rich, constructing a populist platform--much like those of Hugo Chavez in Venezuela and Evo Morales in Bolivia--in order to garner the votes of the poor. With oil prices high, populism seemed more feasible than ever.

Enter Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. He is a fanatic, a throwback to the zealotry of the Khomeini years, who had plied his trade in the dreaded paramilitaries until he was recruited as the populist face of the conservative reaction. Throughout his campaign, Ahmadinejad traveled to poor provinces and promised to end social and economic disparities. He blamed economic problems on the private sector and its reformist supporters in government, and he promised to end privatization, protect state subsidies, alleviate poverty, invest in infrastructure, and create jobs. It hardly mattered that his harangues made little economic sense. They were precisely what those whom economic change had left behind wanted to hear. Ahmadinejad showcased his humble two-bedroom home in a poor neighborhood of Tehran while his supporters handed out CDs showing Rafsanjani's gilded lifestyle. Ahmadinejad wanted to be seen as one of the revolution's downtrodden masses, the so-called mostazafin, fighting the fat cats whose greed and corruption had betrayed the revolution's populist goals.

After he won, Ahmadinejad further cultivated the image of the humble outsider, refusing to travel in the presidential jet or with a motorcade. He once flew commercial to a provincial capital with his entourage of twenty, and then took a taxi to the governor's office. He promised to transfer wealth to the poor and to raise their standard of living. He threatened to scuttle Tehran's stock market, and he slashed interest rates--measures that he claimed favored the poor, but which led to devastating capital flight. Parliament blocked his idea for an extravagant "marriage fund" to help struggling young people form families, but his constituency cheered his effort. Most of his fiery speeches denouncing Israel, doubting the Holocaust, and confirming Iran's determination to plod ahead with its nuclear capability are given to cheering crowds in small towns in far-flung provinces.

This political provincialism is not necessarily a sign of naivete. Ahmadinejad understands that Tehran's political significance has shrunk, that Iranian politics has become increasingly local. He knows retail-level electoral tactics--which probably mattered more than ideology for his victory--and that in the provinces bread-and-butter concerns dwarf the debate over democracy. Unlike the Eastern European

communist rulers who had lost their peoples by the 1980s, Iran's hardliners know that they have a solid and zealous 18 to 20 percent base among die-hard elements drawn from war veterans, paramilitary cadres, and their families. Ghalibaf assembled focus groups to branch out from there by capturing the mood of the middle class and urban youth, but Ahmadinejad's skillful use of populism proved him the better strategist.

Since the 2004 and 2005 elections, conservatives have mostly left the middle classes and urban youth alone, so as to focus on appeals to the poor. Ahmadinejad even conceded to a reformist demand by declaring that women could attend soccer matches in stadiums (Iran's most prominent public places), thereby angering senior clerics. Many student leaders, as well as Ganji, Iran's leading dissident, have been released since Ahmadinejad's election, as if to say that the reformists simply do not concern him. (This may be changing, though: last month Ramin Jahanbegloo, a well-known intellectual, was jailed on a trumped-up charge of espionage, but more likely for having criticized the theocracy.)

Not all Iranian youth are secular. Many share the regime's values. The past decade has seen a resurgent folk piety, especially among the young, which deviates from Khomeini's puritanical, anti-ritualistic version of Islam. In recent years, major holidays such as Ashura have taken on the quality of youth festivals, sometimes mixing devotional practices with Westernized music, to the ire of purist clerics. Most notably, there has been a growing devotion to the Shia messiah, the twelfth imam or Mahdi, whom Shia Muslims believe was miraculously hidden from ordinary human perception one thousand years ago, to return at the end of time. Signs of devotion to the Mahdi are ubiquitous in Iran today--most noticeably among otherwise Westernized young people. Some years ago I visited the Jamkaran Mosque outside the clerical city of Qom. The mosque gained fame when Ahmadinejad, soon after his election, dedicated millions to its repair and sent an official to pledge the government's commitment to hastening the return of the Mahdi, who is said to have once appeared at Jamkaran. The faithful flock to the mosque from near and far, much like the Shrine of the Virgin of Guadalupe in Mexico. During my recent visit, Jamkaran was teeming with young people, many in up-to-date Western clothes and hairstyles; and only Ahmadinejad seems to have grasped the political implications of this youthful religiosity.

Faced with such cagey hard-line rivals, the reformists fell into a long debate over whether to call for a voter boycott (as urged by the jailed Ganji). And by the time the reformists realized that they would have to take the election seriously, the conservatives had defined the race. The best-known reformist candidate, Mohammad Moin, was a reconstructed revolutionary with a checkered past but no charisma or imagination. Worse yet, reformists had no plan for rallying the diverse groups that should have voted for them. Too many candidates were chasing the same reformist voters, who also harkened to appeals from moderate conservatives such as Rafsanjani and Ghalibaf. And so more or less reform-friendly candidates arguably took sixteen million of the twenty-seven million first-round votes, but divided they fell. Moin, the top clear reformist in the race, finished fifth.

Beneath the reformists' tactical confusion lay strategic and philosophical confusion. Their pro-democracy message was an uncertain trumpet, as they wavered between calling for complete change and saying that reform of the Islamic Republic could suffice. Should theocracy be mended or ended? Reformists could not say. They held study groups on the constitution, but they split over what constitutional change

should mean. Some, including professors and secular lawyers such as Shirin Ebadi, spoke of a new liberal and non-theocratic constitution. Others, such as the Ayatollah Montazeri, wanted to rescind only those post-Khomeini changes that had strengthened the position of the Supreme Leader. Some even looked back at Khomeini with nostalgia as an honest man of the people.

Ebadi's memoir is a palimpsest of reformist equivocations. In her view, democracy includes neither those who never supported the revolution nor the millions whom the revolution turned into refugees and forced into exile. Iranian expatriates--including, one would presume, her expatriate co-author, Azadeh Moaveni--stand outside her vision of Iran, as if they are traitors. "When someone leaves Iran," writes Ebadi, "it is as though that person has died for me." In a chilling passage, she describes erasing the names of friends who fled Iran from her address book and never putting pen to paper to write them. Exile in Ebadi's eyes is a scarlet letter, forever excluding those who fled from the revolution that she celebrates. Her democracy movement is a meanly limited group of former revolutionaries whose folly brought Khomeini to power and who now want to move beyond his legacy.

The democracy debate in Iran has never concerned itself with lunch-pail issues. During the elections it was left to the obstreperous cleric Mehdi Karroubi--a relic of the early years of the revolution and an adviser to the Supreme Leader, who has lately gravitated toward reform--to put forward an economic argument. He promised that if elected, the government would give every Iranian the equivalent of \$50 a month. That is hardly a substitute for a coherent economic policy; but the proposition was attractive to many voters in a society with rampant unemployment. Karroubi can be credited with bringing many more people than expected to the polls, and also for taking votes away from the main reformist candidates by presenting a reformist version of Ahmadinejad's populism.

Reformists were slow to realize that by the end of Khatami's term, democracy meant not prosperity, but gridlock and ineffectual government. A proreform businessman told me the sordid and paradigmatic story of the Imam Khomeini International Airport, supposedly a showcase and a gateway to world trade and tourism. Shortly after Khatami opened it in 2004, the Revolutionary Guards closed its runway, complaining (in a weird foreshadowing of the ill-fated Dubai ports deal in the United States) that the airport's Austro-Turkish management consortium had dealings with Israel, and that this posed a threat to Iran's national security. In reality, the Guards coveted the lucrative contract and wanted to run the new airport as they had the old one. The airport stayed closed for nearly a year as costs piled up, and an embarrassed Khatami had to cancel a state visit to Turkey, and the transport minister faced impeachment by a parliament where Revolutionary Guardsmen and veterans hold 30 percent of the seats. My interlocutor ended by observing that it might be good to have the Guards' commander as president, for then at least it would be clear who was running the show. Some even seem to think that the men at arms might be better managers: after all, they managed to build nuclear projects despite sanctions.

Businessmen crave order, of course, and their potential regard for the man on horseback is hardly confined to Iran: witness the history of Latin America, or perhaps more to the point, the current situation in Pakistan, where a pro-business general enjoys Western allies. On the eve of elections, Iran seemed to be gripped with a Bonapartist fever. There were even veiled appeals to the legacy of Reza Shah, the autocratic modernizer who founded the Pahlavi dynasty in the early twentieth

century and pulled the country by its bootstraps into the modern world. With the poor wanting jobs and business wanting effective governance, where was democracy? Conservative candidates boasted that they could work with the Supreme Leader and get things done. The reformists could guarantee no such thing. The pragmatic choice was to vote conservative.

Before he ran for president, Ahmadinejad had briefly served as mayor of Tehran, a position that he owed to his Revolutionary Guards backers. His stint in the mayor's office was an opportunity to re-package an inexperienced militant as an effective administrator. He fought public corruption, used the Guards' slush funds to give garbage collectors and bus drivers a raise, and built sports complexes and parks in poor neighborhoods. His patrons in the Guards helped him to ease Tehran's nightmarish traffic with new highways through previously restricted military zones. While Ahmadinejad has always been an ideological firebrand--through a career dedicated to doing the bully work of the Islamic Republic and following fringe radical groups and their extremist views--this is not what made him president. What mattered more were the signs that a president favored by the powers-that-be could succeed where Khatami had failed. And so Ahmadinejad transformed himself into the can-do, no-nonsense public executive.

The election results left the reformists devastated. Ahmadinejad finished second to Rafsanjani in the first round, but won the two-man runoff with a whopping 62 percent. And it was a high-turnout election, the kind in which the reform vote should have figured largely (Khatami's landslide in 1997 was the highest-turnout election in Iranian history). While evidence that clerics and Guards officials had illegally helped Ahmadinejad was plentiful, there were no big protests. It was also clear that, even allowing for the irregularities, Ahmadinejad had done better than expected, and won by a genuinely wide margin in the runoff. As Tehran resident Mohammad Ghouchani, the influential editor of the leading reformist paper *Shargh*, put it, in 2005 "reformism lost to democracy."

After the elections, things did not look good for the reformists. Their two main factions took nearly a year even to agree to meet, with the goal of crafting a common platform. Meanwhile, the slide toward marginality has continued as the conservatives ride high, confident in the knowledge that they have beaten the reformists at their own game. The reformists now find themselves shut out of all political institutions, their hopes of using the presidency to open the system in tatters. Purges have driven professionals with reformist leanings out of the government bureaucracy. Their replacements are dour, dyed-in-the-wool hard-liners who lack experience and competence but burn with ideological zeal and a desire to make a reformist comeback impossible. The new culture minister has been especially virulent, proudly embracing book censorship. The nuclear watchdogs of the International Atomic Energy Agency have felt the chill wind too, as faithful hard-liners have replaced the familiar diplomats managing the nuclear negotiations.

The reformists in Iran are simply unprepared, intellectually and organizationally, to confront a conservative regime that enjoys the legitimacy of popular election. Ahmadinejad's populist rhetoric will likely lose its charm as his inexperienced government fails to deliver, but high oil revenues and the rally-'round-the-flag effect of nuclear tensions with the United States may disguise and forestall the effects of that disillusionment for some time. Appeals for liberal-democratic change will have a hard time being heard in a time of national crisis, more so now that the United States has announced plans to spend \$85 million to promote democracy in Iran.

What, then, of the search for democracy in Iran? It seems to be everywhere and nowhere at once. There is no other country in the region more suitable for the nurturing of the sapling of democracy. Iranians want democracy, and they cherish democratic practices. But there is no simple and straight path to democracy in Iran. The battle lines are unclear, and as the elections last year showed, open political contestation has favored populist authoritarianism over democracy, albeit through the ballot box. Talk of democracy in Iran is rife, especially in the West; but the reality is that Iran now has a stable authoritarian regime, and there is no obvious way to dislodge it.

It will be difficult to make up for the opportunity that was lost during the Khatami years. Building a viable movement for full and politically secular democracy will take time. It needs organization and coalition-building; but above all it needs a convincing and uncompromising message--one that breaks absolutely with the legacy of the revolution and the nostalgia for its promise, and rejects any half-hearted attempts at reforming the theocracy. (There is an Islamic case, as well as a secular one, for a complete break.) In this task Shirin Ebadi can offer no guidance. Hers is the perplexed voice of a hopelessly inbetween generation, torn between the intoxications of its youth and the realities of an ugly present. It will remain for others to see more clearly what she sees only through a glass darkly.

Iran Won't Budge

Weekly Standard

By Hillel Fradkin

6/6

LAST WEEK, the Bush administration adopted a new approach to the crisis with Iran over Tehran's pursuit of uranium enrichment and nuclear weapons. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice offered to join the negotiations with Iran (heretofore conducted by the E.U. Three--France, Germany and Britain) on one condition: Iran must suspend all enrichment activities in a verifiable manner.

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad quickly rejected any cessation of enrichment. Speaking at the tomb of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the Islamic Republic's founder, he declared, "The Iranian nation's right to nuclear technology and power is legal and definite, and we will not talk about these issues." Statements over the weekend by Iranian officials, above all Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, affirmed this position.

End of story? Not quite. So far, the U.S. government is refusing to take no for an answer. Its immediate reason is that it has not yet officially communicated its offer, which is to include a set of carrots and sticks--incentives or penalties, depending upon whether Iran agrees to negotiations on the stipulated condition.

So our approach is to regard the issue as still open for some time. (We have stipulated that the Iranians would have several weeks to respond.) Our view, it seems, is that Iran is not permitted to say no until it knows what is on the table.

Once a formal offer is made, will Iran agree to our condition and enter direct talks? Not likely.

First, Iran isn't tempted by the carrots. Ahmadinejad has said that the incentives are like the sweets and treats that could only tempt a child--that they are laughable and even insulting.

Nor is it frightened by the sticks. Indeed it is not clear what they are or even whether they exist in any meaningful sense. The United States has reportedly proposed a series of potentially severe sanctions--political, economic and especially financial--that would be backed by the authority of the Security Council.

Some of these, if really applied, might genuinely hurt--and just possibly force Iran to consider a different course of action. But several of our "partners"--especially China and Russia--have made clear that they do not endorse anything of this order of severity. Iran thus has no reason, for the moment, to feel intimidated and every reason to wait and see if it is truly disadvantaged.

But the most important reason is the great value Iran, and in particular Ahmadinejad, sees in the pursuit of nuclear enrichment and weaponry. He has referred to it as "a golden treasure." And he is right, from the perspective of his ambitions, which are increasingly those of the regime as a whole.

In the year since he was elected, Ahmadinejad has moved aggressively--and thus far successfully--to revive the regime's morale and strengthen its control over Iran. He has reasserted with great rhetorical vigor the full revolutionary mission of Ayatollah Khomeini, and revitalized the core of cadres--the Revolutionary Guard and Militia--that still embrace that vision. In this, he has addressed the fears of collapse that had arisen within the regime over the years since the death of Khomeini.

Khomeini's vision, however, went beyond clerical rule over Iran. It asserted the wholesale rejection of liberal democracy there and everywhere in the world and a mission to ultimately destroy it. This envisaged a grand transnational alliance of radical Muslim movements. Ahmadinejad has reasserted this as well--as was made abundantly clear in his recent letter to President Bush, which asserted the decline of liberal democracy and looked forward to its demise.

In addition to this fidelity to Khomeini's legacy, Ahmadinejad has endeavored to establish himself as Khomeini's true successor, seeking a leadership role throughout the Muslim world--including in such far-away places as Indonesia, which he visited recently. He has reinforced longstanding support for Syria and Lebanese Hezbollah and sought an alliance with Hamas, the new radical rulers of the Palestinian Authority. He has laid claim to superior standing by calling for the destruction of Israel and, in general, seeking confrontation with the United States.

For all these purposes--the Iranian and the pan-Islamic--the pursuit of nuclear weaponry is indeed a "golden treasure." Actual possession of nuclear weapons would aid in the survival of the clerical regime--as the North Korean case made clear--and protect Iran's efforts to involve itself in radical endeavors elsewhere in the Muslim world; indeed, the enormous prestige of being a nuclear power would enhance the latter project.

In short, Ahmadinejad has no good reason to agree to our condition to suspend enrichment. Thus it is most unlikely that there will be negotiations on our terms.

If there are negotiations, they are likely to be among ourselves--among the United States, the Europeans, Russia and China. There may be several subjects of these negotiations, but the most crucial will be whether to drop our demand for a cessation of enrichment.

The Bush administration has insisted that this it will not do. Indeed, there is no point to any negotiations unless they achieve at a minimum an interruption of Iranian nuclear development. But at least some of our partners will be tempted to think and say otherwise and to try to persuade us to negotiate directly anyway.

President Bush and Secretary Rice have of course anticipated this line of argument; Rice has asserted that the United States does not and will not accept it. She has held out the hope that the proposal to Iran and especially the sanctions might still persuade Iran to desist from its nuclear program. If not, she has said, the next step will be to impose sanctions.

But if the administration maintains this position--and it should--we will have to persuade our "partners" to do so. This will involve further negotiations with them, especially China and Russia--and this prospect, given the record, is not exactly promising. After that, who knows?

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Is Bill Clinton Still President?

National Review

By Michael Ledeen

6/7

From time to time various wags have suggested that we send Bill Clinton to negotiate with the mullahs on our behalf. It turns out it isn't necessary; we've just adopted his methods. Apparently those in charge of our Iran non-policy concluded that the appeasement of North Korea worked so well, we should do the same thing with Iran. I suppose it's only a matter of time before Condi borrows one of Albright's big hats, and goes to Tehran to dance with their dictator.

The architects of this latest foolishness are whispering the same reassuring nonsense as their predecessors did about North Korea: We're offering light-water reactors, which aren't as dangerous as heavy-water reactors, we won't give them anything unless they agree to stop enrichment, blah, blah, blah. All of which is true, and totally insane, since a madman is, famously, a person who thinks that he will produce a different outcome by doing the same thing over and over again.

It is utterly fanciful to think that Iran will negotiate away their nuclear-weapons program, whatever the combination of diplomatic carrots and sticks. They have no interest whatsoever in giving away their bombs, whatever the actual status of their arsenal. For them, the only point of negotiations is to gain more time to pursue their war against us, to kill more Americans and Brits in Iraq, to mobilize more jihadis all over the region, to threaten our regional friends and allies, to enlarge their terror network throughout the world, to stuff their war chest with petrodollars, and to

enlarge their arsenal.

I do not believe any of the Europeans seriously believes that the mullahs will abandon any of their war plans, whether it is enrichment or terrorism or political subversion or the intimidation of lesser regional players. I think the Europeans view the negotiations as a method of restraining us, not bringing the Iranians to heel. They have long since adopted a policy of total appeasement. To her shame Chancellor Merkel came to Washington a few weeks ago and begged President Bush to play along. And he shamefully agreed.

The much-heralded announcement that we were willing to sit down with the Iranians if they halted their enrichment program was either a total collapse or a gambit designed to expose the Iranians' unwillingness to play by the international rules. If the latter, it was too clever by half, as shown by the sorts of Western offers that are now trickling out of the foreign offices. We have actually set a clever trap for ourselves. The carrots are precisely what negotiations were supposed to be all about, and here we've offered them in advance of talks. The Iranians are certainly smart enough to say "well, that's interesting, and maybe if you make the pot a bit more caloric, we might even agree to suspend enrichment. Let's talk about it." The Europeans and our statesmen will declare a diplomatic triumph and they will say to Bush that we do indeed have to talk about it, and then we will have lost even this little gambit. We will have undertaken negotiations, and the Iranians will not have ceased enrichment. We will still not have an Iran policy, we will still have done nothing to support freedom in Iran, and we will still be pretending it is possible to win a regional war by playing defense in Iraq alone.

The political consequences of such foolishness are very hard to calculate, but it is certain that any Iranian contemplating risking his or her life on behalf of a free Iran will be discouraged at the spectacle. It is also certain that this demarche--to use a word much beloved by the diplomats--will reinforce the extremely dangerous conviction in Tehran that they are winning, and we will do nothing to threaten them. This is what makes the latest gambit so self-destructive. It will encourage the mullahs to intensify their attacks--real attacks, not merely verbal ones--on all fronts. They think we are headed out of Iraq, in abject humiliation, as a result of their terror war against us, and they will now redouble those efforts.

Would you not do the same in their position? Of course you would, and you would do it even if you were not a fanatic, you would do it if you were a student of Bismarck and Clausewitz and Sun Tzu.

But these are fanatics, millenarian fanatics who believe that the world is headed for a final and decisive confrontation between the forces of Islam and the infidels and crusaders. They believe that the final days are at hand, and that they are the instruments of Divine power and glory. They have no doubt about their ultimate triumph, and everything they see in the West only reinforces their confidence, and leads them to redouble their murderous efforts.

Their vision is not world peace, but world domination, accompanied by the slaughter of their enemies. And we are encouraging them in that vision.

I do not believe we will surrender and give them a free hand, but our current behavior only makes the ultimate confrontation with Iran more difficult and likely more violent than it need be. No matter how unwilling Western leaders may be to

respond to their 27-year war against us, we cannot escape it, because they will not permit us to escape. It is a conflict we can either win or lose, but we cannot opt out of it. Eventually we will be compelled to respond.

At the moment, most of our leaders are trying desperately to convince themselves that there is a way out, that we can make a grand bargain, that we do not have to confront the mullahs. It is the illogic of appeasement so well described by Churchill after Munich. Chamberlain, he said, had to choose between war and dishonor. Chamberlain chose dishonor, and he got war. This is the risk our leaders are running today.

And the hell of it all is that the mullahs are terribly vulnerable, loathed by their own people, our natural allies in what is after all a political and ideological conflict. Our failure to support the Iranians' cry for freedom is a dark stain on our banners, and worse: Our dishonor leads directly a war that we should not need to fight. We can defeat the mullahs the same way we defeated the Soviet Union, by mobilizing their own people against them, and by consistently stating and supporting our own ideals. Instead we are sending our young men and women into the field to fall alongside innocent Iraqis to whom we promised a better fate.

Faster, please. Please.

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

Slipping Up

National Review

By Ilan Berman

6/7

Who's afraid of Iranian oil power? If the Islamic Republic of Iran has its way, the West will be.

In recent weeks, as the international crisis over Iran's runaway nuclear ambitions has deepened, officials in Tehran have repeatedly rattled their sabers about energy, raising the prospect of a disruption of energy trade in the Persian Gulf. Most recently, Iran's supreme leader himself has warned publicly that the West could face disruptions in fuel shipments from the Persian Gulf if it makes a "wrong move" against Iran.

Iranian officials have every reason to feel confident in making such threats. After all, the Islamic Republic is now a bona fide energy superpower. Home to 10 percent or more of world oil, it is the second largest exporter in the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), and produces an average of 3.9 million barrels of oil per day. To boot, with 940 trillion cubic feet of reserves, Iran is second only to Russia in natural gas wealth. And, intelligence analysts say, a combination of advantageous geography and a sustained national rearmament has given Iran the ability to dominate, at least temporarily, the Strait of Hormuz, the principal passageway for roughly two fifths of world oil trade. What's more, thanks to a series of blockbuster energy deals over the past couple of years, the Islamic Republic quite literally now

has some of the world's largest economies over a barrel.

But is energy really Iran's trump card, as some have suggested? In fact, a closer look indicates that the "oil weapon"--whether in the form of reductions in Iranian output or military moves in the Hormuz Strait--is likely to be a double-edged sword for the Islamic Republic.

For all of its energy clout, the Islamic Republic is not impervious to economic countermeasures. The vast majority (80 to 85 percent) of Iran's export earnings, as well as one half of its budget and a quarter of its gross domestic product, currently derives from energy sales. As a result, over the past two years Iran has reaped a staggering fiscal windfall, amounting to dozens of billions of dollars, from the rising price of world oil. But Iran's single-sector economy is deeply dependent on foreign direct investment to maintain this output. If they were to be applied consistently and multilaterally, therefore, measures that reduce the foreign capital flowing into Iran's energy sector have the ability to cause Tehran some serious economic pain.

In particular, Iran is severely susceptible to domestic pressure. Despite massive oil exports (some 2.5 million barrels a day), Iran currently imports a third or more of its refined petroleum products from abroad, at a cost of over \$3 billion annually. These imports are not simply surplus; according to some estimates, Iran maintains just 45 days worth of gasoline domestically. Since all politics is ultimately local, this suggests that the inevitable economic squeeze that would accompany an Iranian energy play is likely to reverberate within Iranian society in the form of gasoline shortages and steep price hikes at the pump. And that, in turn, could create major domestic problems for Iran's ayatollahs.

Perhaps most important, however, is the fact that Iranian interference with the global energy market has the ability to do what the nuclear issue so far has not: crystallize a forceful international consensus against the Islamic Republic. The Bush administration may have thrown its weight behind the creation of a "package" of inducements and penalties designed to bring Iran back to the nuclear negotiating table, but Iran's ayatollahs know full well that a major energy play on their part is likely to give American calls for more robust measures a much-needed shot in the arm. Simply put, there is no quicker way to turn energy-hungry nations such as China and India into proponents of regime change in Tehran than by turning off the oil tap.

Given these realities, the rhetoric emanating from the Islamic Republic looks more than a little bit like bluster. So far, though, this strategy appears to be succeeding; investor jitters over a looming confrontation with Tehran are directly responsible for the recent spike in crude oil prices--and the attendant chorus of voices warning about the dire consequences of seriously bringing Iran to account.

In their planning, the Bush administration and its international partners would do well to take doomsday predictions about Iranian energy leverage with a grain of salt. But they should also be thinking carefully about the economic and political costs of inaction. Simply put, Washington must ask itself whether the world would be better off with a temporary spike in energy prices created by a serious Iran strategy, or with a permanent hike in the cost of doing business in a region dominated by an atomic Islamic Republic.

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Containing Iran

Atlantic

By Jonathan Rauch

6/8

Cold War strategies might help us handle Tehran's nuclear ambitions

Boil away the verbiage, and Americans' reaction to Iran's apparent drive for nuclear weapons amounts to: "Oh, no!" It's a reasonable reaction. A bitter enemy appears determined to acquire fearsome weapons, or the capability to produce them (which comes to the same thing). A preventive military strike might do little more than buy a couple of years, and at a steep price. Iran might drop a bomb on Israel; it might give the bomb to terrorists; it might use the bomb to blackmail and dominate the Middle East; it might feel emboldened to export terror and insurgency without constraint.

"Iran armed with a nuclear weapon poses a grave threat to the security of the world," President Bush said in January. Various other assessments make Bush's sound comparatively low-key. In September, Congressman Trent Franks, a Republican from Arizona, called Iran a "diabolical threat to Western civilization" whose ambitions, if not stopped, "will lead to a disastrous situation with catastrophic consequences worldwide."

The ascendancy of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad gives particular cause for alarm, not least because he has called the Holocaust a myth, renewed Iran's commitment to eliminate Israel, and declared that anyone who objects to Iran's achieving nuclear capability should "be angry and die of this anger." Writing in Britain's *Sunday Telegraph*, the historian Niall Ferguson imagines the upshot: Iran and Israel engage in a devastating nuclear exchange; the resulting "Great Gulf War" marks the end of the oil age—even, perhaps, "the twilight of the West."

Maybe. To repeat: "Oh, no!" is a reasonable reaction. A uranium-enriched Ahmadinejad is a prospect the United States should seek strenuously to avoid, even if the cost is high. But if resignation is the wrong attitude, so is panic. If Iran emerges as a nuclear state, one country in the world will be providentially equipped with decades of applicable experience and a proven strategic template. The country is the United States, the experience is the Cold War, and the template is containment.

Here are some things we have seen before: a nuclear-armed country with a brittle and aggressive ideology, world-revolutionary aspirations, and a belief in the historic inevitability of its triumph against a decadent and ultimately hollow West. In that country, an unpopular and divided regime, with hard-liners and relative pragmatists squabbling for influence. A crumbling, resource-dependent economy. A paranoid worldview in which America is an omnipresent military and ideological threat. A tactical predilection for supporting and manipulating insurgent proxies around the world, instead of engaging in direct confrontations. Above all, a belief that nuclear

weapons are strategically essential to deter the United States and maintain national prestige.

Yes—but the Soviet Union was deterrable. Would the same be true of a nuclear Iran? No one knows, and no one wants to find out, and Ahmadinejad's trash-talking is alarming. Still, that Iran will be "a suicide bomber with a radioactive waist" (as one commentator put it recently) is not a given. The Brookings Institution's Kenneth M. Pollack, the author of *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict Between Iran and America*, points out that Iran has been aggressively anti-American "but not reckless." He explains, "These guys try to press the edge of the envelope, but if they find they've pressed too far, they pull back." Behaviorally, if not rhetorically, the Iranians seem more akin to the opportunistic Nikita Khrushchev of the Cuban missile crisis than the delusional Saddam Hussein of the Kuwait invasion and the Iraq War.

One can hardly count on predictability from the likes of Ahmadinejad. But the presidency is only one of a number of competing Iranian power centers; the supreme ruler is Iran's top cleric, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. The fact that Ahmadinejad and his energetic faction are vying for control is not reassuring, but it is worth remembering that Stalin and Khrushchev were not reassuring figures either. Only in hindsight is it evident that they were deterrable.

"Many today forget that Stalin's Soviet Union and Mao Zedong's China were seen as more threatening in both capabilities and intentions than are today's mullahs in Tehran," writes Richard K. Betts, of Columbia University's Saltzman Institute of War and Peace Studies, in *The National Interest*. Even if the Cold War Soviet leadership lacked the Armageddon-minded nuttiness of Ahmadinejad, it was more than paranoid enough to be frightening. "What made things very dangerous," says Timothy Naftali, a University of Virginia Cold War historian, "was that the Soviets were at times willing to be brinksmen in a nuclear world."

When American strategists chose to deter and contain the Soviet Union, they didn't know it to be deterrable and containable. At times, respectable strategists thought it wasn't. Rather, the United States settled for the deter-and-contain model because the other options seemed worse.

In the end, of course, the Cold War strategy succeeded, spectacularly. The United States not only got regime change in the Soviet Union, it got it without the kind of conflagration or implosion that the collapse of a nuclear superpower might easily have brought. The West was lucky, no doubt, but it was also patient and, on the whole, skillful.

Iran is, if anything, more vulnerable to long-term pressure than the USSR was. It is smaller and weaker in every dimension. Its economy is a mess. Its oil weapon fires backward as well as forward, because oil sales keep Iran's economy afloat. And, unlike the Soviet Union, Iran has no conceivable hope of disarming or crippling America with a first strike; America's deterrent against Iran is massive, credible, and impregnable.

During the Cold War, once a credible deterrent was in place, containment meant both hemming in the Soviets (between NATO and the Pacific alliances) and drawing them into arms-control talks and security arrangements and grain deals that made trigger fingers less twitchy. The two approaches, though often in tension, were not mutually exclusive, nor would they be in the case of a nuclear Iran. One can envision

a regional consortium aimed at containing Iran—what Pollack calls a NATO for the Persian Gulf. The Gulf Cooperation Council, along with Iraq, Turkey, Jordan, and others in the region, might join with the United States (and maybe Europe) to agree on countermeasures to be used if Iran invaded one of them, proliferated nukes, or destabilized its neighbors. At the same time, the consortium might also negotiate a pact in which Tehran agreed not to cross any of those red lines, in exchange for security guarantees.

Americans would see such an agreement as a deal with the devil, and they'd be right. But the United States dealt with the Soviets, who were at least as murderous as the mullahs and far mightier, and the end result was regime change. It took a while, but containment is a long game, and it's a game on which the United States wrote the book.

The example of the Cold War does not counsel complacency in the face of Iran's nuclear exertions. Nor does it imply that force is off the table. It does counsel calm. If we appear deathly afraid of atomic ayatollahs, we may do less to deter them from going nuclear than to convince them that going nuclear will deter us.

* * *

Iran Connects the Dots

National Review

By Michael Ledeen

6/9

It didn't take long for the yackers and scribblers to start pooh-poohing the significance of the elimination of Zarqawi. The MSNBC/al-Reuters headline said it all: 'Zarqawi more myth than Man.' And of course, the hate-America crowd was hinting that the 'timing' was peculiar (Bush needed a boost in the polls), as if killing Zarqawi was just a matter of giving the order, rather than a difficult operation made possible by the great performance of our Special Forces and the active cooperation of Sunni tribal leaders in the Anbar Province, plus the Jordanians, plus the various party leaders in Baghdad.

Whatever the "explanation," the significance of this operation is enormous. It's not just about Iraq (it very much involves North America, for example), and it effectively explodes one of the most dangerous confusions about the nature of the terror network.

Zarqawi was a very important man in the terror network. I first noticed him some years ago, reading the German and Italian press. Several terrorist cells in those countries had been rounded up, and court documents showed that in both countries the network had been created from Tehran, by Zarqawi. Thus, years before we went into Iraq, Zarqawi was already a major player in international terrorism, and in recognition of his skills he was sent into Iraq as one of the organizers of the terror war against us and the Iraqi people.

Despite his intonations against the Shiites, and his manifest efforts to promote civil war in Iraq, Zarqawi was happy to work with the radical Shiite regime in Tehran, and they were happy to work with him. It is quite wrong to view him as a leader of one faction in a religious war; his promotion of religious conflict was simply a tactic designed to destabilize Iraq and drive out the Coalition. He and his Iranian

backers/masters were desperate to promote all manner of internal Iraqi conflict: Kurds against Arabs, Turkamen against Kurds, anything that worked. It's The Godfather all over again: the terror masters put aside their differences, sat down around the table, and made a war plan in which Sunni and Shia, Syrian and Saudi, Iranian and Iraqi cooperated against their common satanic enemy, the United States.

One other very important factoid emerged from the accounts of the attack on Zarqawi: we killed two women in the same house. We did it deliberately, because they were his key intelligence officers. From which two lessons should be drawn. First, women get something approaching parity in the jihadist terror organizations, despite endless citations from the holy Koran demanding their subservience. These were not suicide bombers, of which we have seen several exemplars in the past; these were important components of the terror headquarters. And second, when our soldiers enter terrorists' quarters and kill women in the ensuing firefight, remind yourself that it might have been entirely proper, since the women may have been terrorists themselves.

Zarqawi played on a global scale. Reports from Canada recount contacts between the 'home-grown' terrorists arrested by the Mounties and Zarqawi himself (See the 'Mississauga News,' June 7: 'The arrest of 17 suspects...is said to be the latest stage in dismantling a terrorist network that's linked to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi...'). Those arrests seem linked to those carried out in Atlanta, Georgia, by the FBI, and to other arrests in Sarajevo, England, and Denmark. It will be surprising if we don't find Zarqawi's claw prints in several of those venues, as the Canadians have said. Remember, it was publicly announced a few months ago that Zarqawi was no longer the head of al Qaeda in Iraq, that henceforth the Iraqi Sunni 'community' would run the terror war there, and that Zarqawi would devote his efforts to the international jihad. It seems he did just that -- and failed.

We have probably just lived through the greatest global counterterrorist operation in history. In Iraq alone, some 16 or 17 terror cells were attacked at the same time as Zarqawi was killed. And the wave of arrests -- just yesterday the Swiss reported they had broken up a cell planning to attack an El Al passenger plane -- is like nothing I have seen before, bespeaking an encouraging degree of international cooperation. It goes hand in hand with the devastating campaign in Iraq against the terrorist leadership. Zarqawi is just the latest to fall; most of his top associates had been eliminated over the course of the past several months.

The global operation seems to have been prompted by the discovery that the terror masters had ordered a worldwide assault, and so far the West has proven equal to the challenge. Let's hope we stay on top of it. The Zarqawi operation will surely encourage people with information on the terrorists to talk to their local spooks; they have seen the terrorists fall, and the informers rewarded. That sort of thing fuels a bandwagon.

These recent successes may even provoke some of our analysts to rethink one of the core doctrines about contemporary terrorism: that it consists of myriad independent cells, tied together ideologically but not operationally. Not so. Shortly after the liberation of Afghanistan, I wrote that al Qaeda had been effectively destroyed, and that we should stop talking about al Qaeda as if it were the most important component in the terror network. I argued that we should conceive of terrorism as a kind of galaxy, with numerous components -- ranging from Hamas and Islamic Jihad

to the rump of al Qaeda and, most importantly, Hezbollah -- who worked together, organized a division of labor, and were held in their orbits and epicycles by the Iranian intelligence apparatus, from the official ministry to the specialized units in the Revolutionary Guards.

The intelligence community was savaged after 9/11 for its failure to connect the dots, and it would be truly embarrassing, and very dangerous, to leave the Iranian dot out there apart from the rest of the network we have uncovered and shattered. A week ago Director of National Intelligence Negroponte gave a very interesting interview to the BBC in which he reiterated what everybody knows: '(the Iranians) are the principal state sponsor of terrorism in the world.'

So how come we're not going after them?

And for those who think the recent 'we'll-talk-if-you-stop-enrichment' gambit was some sort of master diplomatic stroke, consider this: it turns out that the Iranians have actually increased their enrichment program.

There is no escape from the necessity of bringing down the mullahcracy, for they will keep killing our people and our friends.

Faster, please.

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

Diplo-Dancing With Iran

Newsweek

By Michael Hirsh With Maziar Bahari

6/12

A month ago Condi Rice was in deep trouble, and she knew it. The secretary of State's strategy for stopping Iran's nuclear program--by uniting major nations against Tehran--was in danger of falling apart. During a dinner meeting on May 8 at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov expressed anger over Vice President Dick Cheney's awkwardly timed blast at Vladimir Putin a few days before. The Russians, essential to the U.S. tactic of isolating Iran, seemed to be jumping ship. Even America's European allies were voicing doubts about Rice's approach. In April, German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier openly called on Washington to reverse its quarter-century-old refusal to hold official talks directly with Iran, endorsing a British suggestion. In private the French signaled they agreed.

Rice faced a separate mutiny from the rear: mounting skepticism in the White House that diplomacy could work at all, along with tough resistance to direct talks from the hard-line faction of Cheney and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld. Meanwhile, Iran's outspoken president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, sensing Western disunity, was getting more brazen than ever. "On May 8 we really didn't have a sense of the way forward," says a senior administration official, who briefed reporters anonymously as part of a policy of allowing Rice to be the administration's public face. "The idea of

two paths was born that evening."

The two paths involve delivering a clear ultimatum to Tehran and, with it, a brand-new inducement. According to the new approach, if Iran cooperates and suspends enrichment of uranium, Washington will sit down and negotiate directly alongside its European partners. (Previously the Americans would go no further than to merely endorse the European-led talks.) Suspension will lead directly to a package of economic incentives and some kind of longer-term relationship with the United States, although Rice pointedly refused to give any upfront security guarantees or promises of normal relations. If Tehran refuses to suspend, on the other hand, the Security Council is ready to agree to an unspecified series of sanctions. A coalition of the willing, including America, Western Europe and possibly Japan, might also impose a painful cutoff of international finances.

As she has so often done, Rice had found a graceful way out of her troubles by compromising--and winning President George W. Bush over to her views. In one swift move, she managed to get ahead of the Iranians, outflank administration hard-liners, delight and unify her European partners (even the Russians)--and spin the whole affair as a triumph of U.S. leadership.

The question now is how the Iranians will respond. Ahmadinejad, predictably, dismissed the offer. But to a degree poorly understood in Washington, he has limited control over Iran's nuclear program. Other Iranian officials were more measured, though they all rejected immediate suspension. "Iran will never give up its legitimate rights, so the American preconditions are just unacceptable," said Mohammad Saeidi, deputy director of Iran's Atomic Energy Organization.

Some observers noted that Rice has gradually softened her stance on what Iran might be allowed to retain. In her remarks announcing the new approach, Rice pointedly did not rule out permitting Iran some enrichment on its soil. The omission startled some hard-liners, and Rice later stated that enrichment of any kind was unacceptable. But a senior U.S. official who also spoke anonymously (deferring to Rice's out-front role) said Saturday that the secretary was sensitive to Iranian needs for a face-saving compromise. "You could think about ways they might do 'nuclear research'," he said. "You don't want to hit these guys in the face." After decades of hostility between Washington and Tehran, that might be the biggest policy change of all.

The World vs. Iran

Time

By Elaine Shannon

6/12

Chalk up a diplomatic win for the White House. President Bush's surprise offer last week to talk to Tehran yielded breakthroughs that have momentarily quelled fears of U.S. military action against the Iranian regime. During a marathon meeting in Vienna with diplomats from the four other permanent members of the U.N. Security Council, as well as Germany and the E.U. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice obtained an unprecedented commitment from Moscow and Beijing to support penalties in the Council if Iran refuses a package of political and economic incentives and continues nuclear activities that could enable it to build a Bomb.

European envoys hope to elicit the regime's answer before July's G-8 summit in St. Petersburg, Russia. The Vienna group agreed that if Iran fails to accede to the world's demands, the matter will return to the Security Council, which would enact unspecified punitive measures.

The unity could crumble if the Vienna group differs on whether Tehran is cooperating. But for now the pressure on Iran from all sides is growing. An International Atomic Energy Agency report on Iran's activities is expected next week, and Western diplomats tell TIME that it will include "potentially incriminating" details about traces of highly enriched uranium recently found by inspectors on equipment at the Lavisan-Shian military site. The find is significant not because of the residue-- it isn't Bomb grade and may have been on the equipment when it was bought from renegade Pakistani nuclear scientist A.Q. Khan--but because Iran hasn't explained why such enrichment tools were found at a military facility. Iranian officials still insist their military is not engaged in nuclear work.

ISRAEL

The Last Word--Efraim Halevy: Matters of Intelligence

Newsweek

By Kevin Peraino

5/15

Few know more about the behind-the-scenes machinations in the Middle East than Israel's notorious Mossad intelligence agency. Of course, the Mossad has inspired its fair share of conspiracy theories as well. As the agency's director from 1998 to 2002, Efraim Halevy was at the center of many of them--from the fallout after an actual botched plot to smear poison on the neck of Hamas leader Khaled Meshaal, to the apocryphal stories of what the agency knew before September 11. NEWSWEEK's Kevin Peraino asked Halevy--currently promoting his new memoir, "Man in the Shadows"--for his thoughts on Iran's nuclear ambitions and the ongoing unrest in the region. Excerpts:

PERAINO: How far away do you think Iran is from getting the bomb?

HALEVY: I think there is a necessity to define exactly what you are talking about. If the problem is how far are they from getting the potential where they can produce a nuclear device, that's one question. The [real] question is whether they are capable of putting together a credible strategic capability, which is something different. I would say that within the next decade they would have the chance of getting the capability if they were left alone.

Why do U.S. and Israeli intelligence estimates seem to differ on this?

I don't think the Americans and the Israelis are talking about the same thing. I think the Israelis are talking about what I was saying before, and I think the Americans are talking about something more comprehensive. I think the difference between the American and Israeli estimates is not that far apart.

Do you think regime change is necessary in Iran?

Ultimately, there will be no real solution to the Iranian problem without dealing with it in its entirety. I think the United States has embarked on efforts to, uh ... encourage the regime change.

Could Iran's nuclear program be deterred, as former U.S. national-security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski recently suggested?

With all due respect, I differ from Brzezinski on this. I think once the Iranians have the capability, one should not assume that their mind-set would be the mind-set that we would like it to be. One of the big mistakes that can be made is to believe that once the Iranians have the capability, that they'll think like people think when they're in Washington.

What kind of retaliation could the world expect in the event of an attack on Iran?

The Iranians supported terrorism of the Hizbullah type, and one has to take into account that Iran might resort to this.

With the current situation in Lebanon, would Hizbullah necessarily take orders from Iran?

Look, Hizbullah is a Shiite force in Lebanon, and as such they take their inspiration from Iran. They receive arms and military support from Iran. However, if pressure in Lebanon continues to mount internally, it could be that under very, very severe strain, Hizbullah in Lebanon would act in its own self-interest, rather than simply a subsidiary of Iranian policies.

Is there anything that the United States can do to salvage the war in Iraq?

I would say one thing. I think it's very important at this particular juncture to try to propel one or two or three local military figures of the emerging Iraqi armed forces to be a visible part of the administration. The people in Iraq have become accustomed over the years to a certain style of leadership. And there is a great importance to be attached to the symbol of a uniform.

Are you talking about a military dictator?

No, I'm not saying a military dictator. I don't want to say something against the democratization process. But somewhere in the bevy of leadership there should also be uniformed people who are prominent who would command the respect of the population.

Is the current Israeli policy of squeezing and hoping to topple Hamas the right policy? Or is a more nuanced approach called for?

I think it is legitimate to maintain pressure on the government, and to press the government in order to bring about--I don't know about a regime change--but to bring about a policy change. There are people in Hamas who are no fools. Hamas has nuances within it. I think Hamas is making a mistake in letting [Damascus-based political bureau leader] Khaled Meshaal be a party to the decision-making process in Hamas. The decisions should be made by the current leadership inside the territories.

Do you think Hamas will be able to raise the money required to keep the Palestinian Authority afloat?

I think there's no chance. They went to Iran, and the Iranians offered them a paltry \$50 million. That's less than what they need for one month. And the money has not yet come through, anyway. Hamas will have to learn the hard way.

Human-Rights Schizophrenia

National Review

By Gerald M. Steinberg

5/23

Kenneth Roth, the longtime head of Human Rights Watch, published a powerful piece on China coinciding with President Hu's recent visit to the U.S. It was an eloquent defense of the need to press China to implement basic human rights, and it was evidence that HRW, when it is not influenced by personal political agendas, can be an effective advocate of human rights. Unfortunately, when it comes to Israel, this has not been the case.

HRW has been criticized in the past for Israel-bashing. This has been the source of intense disagreements between Roth and me. I went so far as to call for his replacement, accusing him of exploiting human-rights norms in promoting a radical anti-democracy agenda. In his article on China, however, I found myself agreeing with his every word. And the same has been true with respect to HRW's recent emphasis on Sudan, Syria, and Iran. So either it is I, along with other critics of HRW, who blindly oppose legitimate criticism of Israel (it might be dismissed as part of a neoconservative ideology), or it is Roth and HRW who apply different and unique criteria that single out Israel unfairly. The evidence shows that it is the latter.

As a detailed NGO Monitor study has shown, between 2001 and 2004, during the height of the terror attacks against Israel, HRW focused one-third of its entire Middle East effort on condemnations directed at Israel. This went far beyond legitimate criticism, and suggested an obsession. Far more pages, reports, press conferences, letters, films, and photography-exhibits sponsored by HRW were devoted to allegations against Israel than to the slaughter taking place in Sudan, or the Palestinian terror campaign. Roth and other HRW officials adopted the false characterization of an "all powerful and aggressive Israel" in contrast to "Palestinian victimization." In the process, human-rights norms were reduced to instruments used to promote personal ideologies and entirely subjective perceptions of power.

The most infuriating instance of HRW's bias came in 2004, when Roth went to the American Colony Hotel in Jerusalem to promote "Razing Rafah," a one sided denunciation of Israeli policy. Its contents were based primarily on unsubstantiated reports of Palestinians, selected journalists, and so-called experts on tunneling. (The IDF actions were in response to the smuggling of weapons and explosives through tunnels under the border with Egypt.)

Apart from the tendentious reporting, the extensive use of loaded terms, such as "war crimes," "violation of international law," etc.--used far more often in HRW reports on Israel than in reports on all other Middle East states--fed anti-Israel

divestment and boycott campaigns. HRW officials participated actively and directly in demonstrations to promote the Caterpillar boycott, and in pressing the U.N. resolutions referring Israel's security barrier to the misnamed International Court of Justice.

As a result, it is questionable whether HRW's reports on and activities concerning China and elsewhere can be considered credible. The answer, which is far from satisfactory, lies in the recognition that Israel is increasingly treated emotionally, making for an exceptional case in almost every sphere. In contrast, there is no such political or ideological framework that taints HRW's activities with respect to China. After the Cold War, Robert Bernstein, who founded Helsinki Watch (HRW's original name) in the 1970s, has focused much of his energies and attention on China. For him, and for many other HRW's founders, opposition to China's oppression of dissidents is a direct continuation of Helsinki Watch's original mission. Moreover, HRW's activities concerning China are overseen by serious professionals, such as Harvard Professor Merle Goldman. As a result, HRW's articles and reports on China are focused, credible, and do not reflect personal agendas and emotions.

This is not the case for HRW's activities with respect to Israel. In addition to Roth, Reed Brody, who served as legal counsel, has shown a particular antipathy to the Jewish state. Brody headed HRW's delegation to the NGO forum of the 2001 Durban Conference, which adopted the strategy of labeling Israel as an "apartheid state." He was also among the leaders of the effort to bring Prime Minister Sharon to trial in Belgium. (Brody's candidacy for a position on the U.N. Commission on Human Rights was recently withdrawn.) HRW's Middle East group also includes Joe Stork, who had been a senior figure in the radical MERIP, Sarah Leah Whitson, whose anti-Israel agenda was reflected in her work with MADRE, and Lucy Mair, who had previously written for the Electronic Intifada. These are not professional appointments, and do not create confidence in the credibility of HRW's reports on Israel.

This bifurcation, or even schizophrenia, in HRW's approach to evaluating human rights is disturbing. The absence of credibility in one area inevitably spills over into the others, as HRW's board members increasingly recognize. In the past year, they have imposed a control mechanism on activities dealing with the Middle East, leading to a noticeable (if belated) emphasis on Darfur, as well as adding Syria, Libya, and Saudi Arabia to HRW's agenda. The hostility toward and distortions concerning Israel continue--as seen in recent public letters with the standard condemnations--but the volume has been reduced significantly.

Nevertheless, if HRW wants to be seen as credible, and to have the moral impact on China, Darfur, and elsewhere that its founders and main supporters seek, the emotional anti-Israel agenda that goes far beyond legitimate criticism must go. Beyond rehabilitating this important organization, these measures will help to restore the tattered reputation of human-rights worldwide.

--Gerald Steinberg heads the Program on Conflict Management at Bar Ilan University and is the editor of NGO Monitor.

A Flight From Genocide

Newsweek

By Kevin Peraino With Joanna Chen

Yassin Adom woke up to the smell of smoke and the thunder of horses galloping through his village of Bora in Sudan's western Darfur region. The 27-year-old engineer and his family fled their home on foot, he says, just ahead of rampaging Janjaweed militiamen. In the hills behind Bora, a Janjaweed man on horseback lifted a Kalashnikov and first gunned down Adom's father, then his cousin and brother. Adom turned and ran, and eventually crossed the border into Egypt. Fearing deportation, he later made his way to the wilderness of northern Sinai. Alone and out of options, he paid a Bedouin \$50 to smuggle him across the border to Israel. "I didn't know where else to go," Adom told NEWSWEEK. "I thought if I told them I was from Darfur, they'd help me."

Instead, they locked him up. Adom is one of roughly 200 illegal Sudanese imprisoned in the Jewish state. Israel forbids granting asylum to arrivals from state sponsors of terrorism like Sudan, the onetime home base of Osama bin Laden. (Jews from such states are welcomed under the Law of Return.) Yet in Israel, a state founded partly as a refuge for Holocaust survivors, the fate of prisoners like Adom has opened a bitter debate about the country's moral obligation to victims of the horror in Darfur, which has claimed more than 200,000 lives. "Jews have been refugees for most of their history," says Yehuda Bauer, a prominent Holocaust scholar at Jerusalem's Yad Vashem center. "We should learn something from it."

Israel has made gestures to non-Jewish asylum seekers in the past. In the 1970s Menachem Begin's government resettled a handful of Vietnamese refugees on Israeli soil. Two decades later a group of Bosnian Muslims found homes in the Jewish state. But Bauer and other Israeli academics focus on a more troubling historical precedent outside Israel: the flood of Jewish emigrants from Nazi Germany to the United Kingdom in the 1930s. At first, British authorities turned away the new arrivals, and later exiled some to prisons on the Isle of Man. (Most were eventually released after popular demonstrations.) Insisting that immigrants from an enemy state should be imprisoned is "exactly what the racists were saying in Britain," says Shlomo Avineri, a political scientist at Jerusalem's Hebrew University.

At least 50 of the recent arrivals from Sudan have fled the slaughter in Darfur; others are fleeing different forms of persecution, or simply seeking better livelihoods. Some of the Sudanese are Muslim, some Christian. The influx began as a tiny trickle last year. Over the following months, a handful of the Sudanese were temporarily placed in kibbutzim. But then the trickle picked up after Egyptian authorities cracked down on Sudanese in Cairo early this year. Israel, worried about border security and reluctant to face a flood of asylum seekers, began holding detainees under a stricter "enemy infiltration" law. "If they know everyone who pays \$50 can come to a modern, democratic state and live happily ever after--why not come to Israel?" asks Yochie Gnessin, a lawyer in the state attorney's office. "We can't accept this. There are 40 million Sudanese!" Even some human-rights advocates acknowledge that Israel could be flooded with Sudanese immigrants if word spreads about resettlement offers.

U.N. officials are now interviewing potential candidates for resettlement outside Israel, and rights groups have challenged the "enemy infiltration" law in Israel's High Court of Justice. But the legal battle is still wending its way through the courts, and the typical timetable for resettlement to other countries is two years, according to Michael Kagan, a lawyer with the Human Rights Clinic at Tel Aviv University. In the

meantime, Adom remains locked up with several other Sudanese detainees. "I don't know what's going on," he says quietly by phone from prison. "I lost myself." It is little consolation that his captors are struggling with their own case of self-doubt.

Virtually Normal

New Republic

By Gadi Taub

5/29

Gadi Taub teaches in the department of communications and the School for Public Policy at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. His book, *The Settlers and the Struggle over the Meaning of Zionism*, is forthcoming in Hebrew.

Just as Lyndon Johnson coasted to the presidency on the blessed memory of John F. Kennedy, Ehud Olmert's ascension to Israel's highest office occurred at a moment rife with both sorrow and warm nostalgia for a very recent past. The Camelot to which Olmert laid claim was the last year of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's reign, when the great militarist reversed his lifelong course and withdrew Israel from Gaza. During this past winter's campaign, Olmert choreographed appearances so that large images of Sharon hovered above him. His ads featured photos of himself at Sharon's side, and they announced that he would follow "Sharon's way."

The campaign demanded modesty from Olmert, who had served as Sharon's deputy prime minister and, more or less, stumbled into his politically propitious position. Photographs captured him running Cabinet meetings seated next to Sharon's glaringly empty, big chair. Among friends, however, before Sharon's physical collapse, he would allow himself--at least for humor's sake--to slip into a less modest mode. Claiming credit for his boss' dramatic ideological turnabout, he would joke, "Well, who do you think pushed the fat guy?"

Modesty aside, Olmert did "push the fat guy." Mostly, he importuned behind closed doors. Then, on December 5, 2003, he gave Sharon a large public shove during an interview with Nahum Barnea, the dean of Israeli political journalism at Yedioth Ahronoth, the country's largest daily. The headline of the resulting story trumpeted "olmert gets out of the territories." Given Olmert's history of hawkishness, one had to rub one's eyes, as Barnea quipped in the piece. Was he really proposing unilateral evacuation from Gaza and the West Bank? Didn't Labor urge a Gaza pullout in the 2003 campaign? And hadn't Sharon pummeled it? Olmert discoursed at length on demography. Jews, he argued, are fast becoming a minority between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. And, since a permanent occupation--de facto apartheid--was neither desirable nor possible, and since renouncing the democratic form of government is out of the question, Israel must evacuate the territories to preserve its Jewish democratic character.

Sharon was sick with the flu when Olmert gave the interview. After he read it in the paper, the prime minister called Olmert from home. As it was later reported, Sharon treated his right-hand man to a dose of his famous sarcasm. "Where are you?" asked Sharon on the phone. "I'm home," said Olmert. "Is your home still on our side, or did you already give it to them?" They both chuckled. "In any case," Sharon said, "I'm recovered now, so you can take a break from running the state."

This was very much Sharon's style. He made you laugh. But when you were done laughing, you were left wondering where you actually stood. And, in Olmert's case, he had good reason to be unsure. Though he probably knew Sharon was ruminating over withdrawal, at least from Gaza, he went beyond that, and his freelancing could have cost him his career. But, by the end of their conversation, Sharon reportedly suggested they sit and have a serious talk about Olmert's proposal. Less than a month later, the prime minister astounded Israel and announced he would unilaterally move out of Gaza.

Though Sharon and Olmert are both longtime hawks, and though both experienced a sharp political conversion, they are very different characters, belonging to very different generations. Sharon, 77 years old, always harbored a dark and tragic view of life--haunted by a fear that, after 2,000 years of exile, Jews have lost the very ability to plant roots. He spent his life obsessed with land. As a politician, he sought to ensure Jewish existence in the Middle East by literally bolting it to the ground; pouring tons of concrete into his housing projects in the occupied territories; and stubbornly defending every hill, plain, and valley. This, he thought, would teach Israelis, as well as their enemies, that the Jews are here to stay. He deeply mistrusted Arabs, yet, as the journalist Ari Shavit has noted, he also envied their devotion to the land. If only the Jews could acquire this mystic sense of roots, and the determination to cling to them at all cost, they just might secure their little Spartan haven in the Middle East.

Beyond this dark, even paranoid, view of the world, there was a tragic note behind Sharon's political conversion: At an old age, he learned that his lifelong efforts were mostly misguided. Only from the helm of state did he realize that Israel's existence was endangered rather than strengthened by the concrete he so relentlessly poured in the territories.

With Olmert, there's no such hint of the dark and tragic. He loves life, its pleasures and luxuries--well-tailored suits, Havana cigars, frequent traveling--and he trusts people more easily and delights in colorful company. During his campaign, he declared that he would make Israel "a country it would be fun to live in." It seemed to most analysts like a frivolous way to talk about politics. But this was no mere slip of the tongue. More than most political elites, Olmert is extremely comfortable in a yarmulke and evinces genuine comfort with religious tradition. Still, Olmert's weltanschauung isn't beholden to a mythical conception of Jewish existence. Compared with Sharon, there is something lighthearted, even yuppie, about him.

Unlike Sharon, who fought in the War of Independence, Olmert was three years old in 1948. During most of his lifetime, the state of Israel was a political fact, rather than a yearning or a miracle. Olmert's generation was the intentional product of Zionism: He sees the Jews as a normal people who wish, or should wish, to live normal lives. This isn't a trivial suggestion. Not in a place so haunted by fantasies.

Olmert is well-aware that he must help Israelis sober up: The right has to awake from the biblical fantasy of Greater Israel, as the left has to put aside hopes for easy peace in a "New Middle East." A few days before the Barnea interview, Olmert hinted as much, speaking at the desert burial site of Israel's founding father, David Ben Gurion: "Ben Gurion's greatness was not just his ability to lift the vision of the ages to great heights, but also to limit it to what the circumstances of the time permitted."

It is strange to hear Olmert quote Ben Gurion, because he was born into a milieu that despised the man and his pragmatic socialism. Menachem Begin, who held the credo "in blood and fire Judea fell, in blood and fire Judea shall rise," used to refer to Olmert as "Ehud, my son." Olmert's actual parents had immigrated from China in 1933 to escape communist persecution. His father, Mordechai, a devoted follower of the revisionist Zionist Zeev Jabotinsky, joined Begin's Irgun militia and right-wing Herut movement. For the first three years of Ehud's life, the Olmert family lived in an old Turkish fortress near the Mediterranean shore, south of Haifa. Disguised as an agricultural settlement, the Irgun used the facility secretly to train its fighters.

After the establishment of the state, the Olmert family settled not far from the old fortress, in Binyamina, along with other members of Begin's Herut movement. They stuck together in a neighborhood they named Nahalat Jabotinsky, after their political forbearer. Despite this ideological kinship with Begin's movement, Ehud's parents were independent-minded. His mother, Bella, believed in a strict upbringing, especially when it came to young Ehud's homework and piano practice. His father served as a Herut member of the Knesset but refused to consistently toe the party line, and Begin ultimately ousted him for his heterodoxy. So the Olmerts were outsiders within a community of outsiders. And, when Ehud would later enter politics, he was already schooled in the politics of dissent.

Ehud aspired to an illustrious military career. But, while training with an elite infantry unit, he broke two limbs. He used his healing time to enroll at Hebrew University, majoring in philosophy, psychology, and law. It was there that he became an activist. In 1966, just 20, he made his real political debut in a speech to a Herut conference. To the audience's shock, he called on Begin, who was actually in the room, to resign for failing to carry national elections. This was more than just heresy. For Herut, Begin was larger than life--the uncontested leader. And the crowd reacted to Olmert with unmitigated fury. Recovering from the initial shock, it rose to storm the podium. He would have been physically assaulted had Begin himself not demanded that they let the young man make his point.

Olmert's earliest political mentor, the dashing lawyer Shmuel Tamir, bolted Herut just months before the 1967 war to establish a new centrist party. And Olmert joined him, as he would later follow Sharon into Kadima. But Tamir's party failed miserably, and the dissidents eventually made their peace with Begin, joining his newly formed Likud Party. In 1973, Olmert won a Knesset seat, becoming Israel's youngest legislator. There he followed Tamir's lead and became a hell-raising muckraker.

His first independent crusade was liberating Israel's professional soccer league from organized crime. He loved the game. But soccer hardly qualified as a life-and-death matter, and crime did not count among the most pressing of Israel's problems, so few took the matter seriously. According to political folklore, when Olmert petitioned the Knesset, he and his fellow crusaders were softly, even fondly, rebuked. The old Orthodox minister of interior, Yosef Burg, looked down from the podium at Olmert with benevolent paternalism. Addressing the rebels by their first names, he quipped, "What organized crime? In this country, nothing is organized. What makes you think crime, of all things, would be?"

But muckraking turned out to be an effective stepping stone--and a more weighty issue than even Olmert had guessed. Working closely with journalists, Olmert exposed the criminal connections of a military hero, General Rehavam Zeevy, and issues of corruption relating to Avraham Offer, the Labor minister of housing. Among

the public, he came to be known as "the investigating MK [Member of Knesset]."

National attention brought opportunities, and these had ironic consequences. Olmert discovered that his parliamentary career attracted legal clients. Israeli law, since changed, permitted MKs to hold private jobs, and Olmert increasingly straddled the fuzzy line demarcating big money and government. His image was gradually turned on its head: from righteous tribune of the plebes to patrician elite.

Accusations of shoddy dealings have long dogged his public life. He was allegedly implicated in a scandal involving forged receipts for donations to the 1988 Likud campaign, of which he was co-treasurer. This affair culminated in the conviction of three other Likudniks. Another allegation detailed a loan of \$50,000 Olmert received in 1981 from the CEO of the Bank of North America, without interest or scheduled payback. But, despite trials and investigations, none of these charges ever added up to a conviction. The fact that he eluded some charges for lack of evidence left his public image tainted. Shortly before the last election, Haaretz published a lengthy story titled "prime minister for lack of evidence." It probably did not help his case that he abandoned his earlier working relationship with journalists. His style as an interviewee is extremely belligerent, and he has, on several occasions, sued reporters for libel--a strategy that has hardly paid off.

As many have remarked, his public image stands in sharp contrast to the flesh-and-blood man. In person, Olmert possesses Clintonian charm: A tall and imposing man, he creates a sense of ease around him. He is quick to hug, and he listens attentively. "One thing was already clear back then," says Uzi Atzmon, who ran the law firm where Olmert worked in the 1970s, "and it's still true: Ehud isn't prone to megalomania, and, unlike so many politicians, he never let success go to his head." The ease with which Olmert creates personal bonds has nothing to do with prestige or rank. As mayor of Jerusalem, he made many personal friendships with the rich and famous. But he befriends the least famous and the least rich with the same ease. When he left his post as minister of health, his office staff held a small farewell ceremony: thank you speeches, toasts, and light refreshments. Amid the festivities, the cleaning lady stepped forward and asked to say a few words. In a thick Russian accent, she described how the minister would arrive early for work. She was often the only other person in the office. Every morning, for two years, he'd make coffee for her, and every morning, between 5:45 and 6:00, they would converse about their families and lives.

The discrepancy between his appealing private self and his sullied public image goes back to his youth. When he first approached his future wife, Aliza Richter, she knew only his public side. They were both activists at Hebrew University, he on the right and she on the left. When he asked her out, she declined. He came across in speeches, she later said, as abrasive and arrogant. But he wouldn't give up. He persuaded the manager of the restaurant where she waited tables to hand over her phone number. Finally, she consented to a date. In a matter of days, they decided to marry.

Aliza Richter was born to Holocaust survivors in a German displaced-persons' camp. Like her parents, she maintained a lifelong commitment to left-wing causes. A social worker by training, she has made "children at risk" her professional concern. She is also an accomplished writer and artist. Recently, she unveiled a series of broken eggshells, painstakingly reconstructed. Far less dashing and talkative than her spouse, her quiet demeanor commands respect. It must not have been easy to

oppose the occupation while her husband was so busy trying to make it permanent, especially when Olmert veered to the extreme right. In late 1978, he supported a bill to annex swaths of Judea, Samaria, and Gaza--a proposal too radical even for Begin's government to touch. For the better part of his career, he was an adamant supporter of the settlers. Aliza, however, never wavered. (And she clearly left an imprint on their youngest son, Ariel, a student at the Sorbonne, who refused to serve in Israel's army.) Olmert recently joked that, after 35 years of argument, she finally wore him down. In any case, after voting against her husband for years, she finally voted for him in March.

In the first decade and a half of their marriage, Aliza and Ehud Olmert had four kids, adopted a fifth, moved between eleven rented apartments, and struggled to make ends meet. By the mid-'80s however, Olmert's law business yielded enough to buy a large house in a pricey Jerusalem neighborhood, and Olmert's political career was on the rise. He belonged--along with Roni Milo and Dan Meridor--to the circle of up-and-coming politicians dubbed "the Likud princes." And, for a time, he seemed like a likely candidate to succeed Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir.

But then Benjamin Netanyahu, Olmert's nemesis ever since, burst onto the scene and offered what seemed like an appealing alternative to the old party machine. He took Likud by storm and forced Olmert to chart a different course. Olmert became mayor of Jerusalem and waited on the sidelines to take another shot at Likud's top slot. This shot came in 1999, when he ran against Sharon in the Likud primaries and failed by a large margin. Defeated, he resigned himself to becoming a Sharon man and remaining mayor.

During his decade in that office, Olmert concentrated on improving Jerusalem's infrastructure--opening the city's skyline for skyscrapers and beginning to build a citywide light train system. While he attempted to solidify municipal jurisdiction over areas east of Jerusalem in the West Bank, Olmert did in his two terms as mayor much more for Jerusalem's Arab neighborhoods than his dovish predecessor, Teddy Kollek, did in six. He secured large government funds to improve services in the eastern parts of the city. Given the demographic realities of Jerusalem, his achievements in office were considerable. Escalating tensions between the city's ultra-Orthodox population, its secular enclaves, and its large Palestinian population made the city almost ungovernable. In spite of all this, Olmert managed to modernize the city's infrastructure.

Presiding over unruly Jerusalem may have sped Olmert's increasing disillusionment with the idea of Greater Israel. The city offers a microcosm of religious and political fundamentalism, and, from this vantage point, Likud's opposition to partition may have looked hopeless. But, if Olmert indeed had such an epiphany, his alliance with Sharon concealed it. Few suspected in the first few years of the new millennium that a Sharon man, let alone Sharon himself, would change his mind so fundamentally.

In the meantime, with Sharon's firm grasp of Likud--and with Netanyahu lurking--Olmert's chances for ever reaching the top looked bleak. And, when he finally announced his break with the ideology of Greater Israel--in that famous Yedioth interview--his chances seemed even bleaker: Only 7 percent of Likud members named him as their preferred candidate for prime minister.

When Sharon formed his second coalition government in 2003, he promised Olmert the treasury ministry--one of the most important portfolios he could offer. But that

promise proved maddeningly fleeting. In an attempt to both pacify and outmaneuver Netanyahu and his supporters, Sharon gave the treasury to Olmert's nemesis. He offered Olmert the considerably less illustrious ministry of commerce and industry and other small perks. At first, Olmert refused and seriously considered fleeing to the private sector. To sweeten the deal and keep Olmert in the fold, however, Sharon offered him the title of senior deputy prime minister, a job that automatically placed him in the top chair if Sharon ever died or grew incapacitated. It was this item that proved decisive.

The seven months between the August 2005 withdrawal from Gaza and the March 2006 elections was one of the most dramatic periods in Israeli history. During that short time, the political world turned over no less than four times. First, there was the pullout itself, which doomed the fate of the old hawkish worldview. Second, Sharon left Likud, breaking the old system dominated by two dueling parties. Then Sharon lapsed into a coma, and finally, after all that tumult, the Palestinians went and elected Hamas.

The first shock, disengagement, turned Sharon from a controversial figure into a widely revered leader. Many now counted him in the same breath with Ben Gurion, Begin, and Yitzhak Rabin. When the second shock--Sharon's break with Likud--came about, this elevated status didn't prevent political analysts from taking a dim view of his new party. It was a one-man enterprise, they claimed, containing people so different, and opinions so diverse, that it would disintegrate without the magnetic pull of Sharon's personal authority.

And, for a moment, after Sharon's collapse--the third shock--it seemed that the pundits' gloomy prophecies might come to fruition. With less than three months left before the elections, Sharon collapsed and Kadima rallied behind Olmert, who now served as acting prime minister, rather than tear itself apart in feuds. To the pundits' surprise, the polls indicated a stable lead for the Sharon-less Kadima, which meant that the center's strength actually lay in its ideology. The very idea seemed strange in an age of Israeli disillusionment. But, nevertheless, there it was in the polls, every weekend, plain as daylight.

With the birth of the center, Israel acquired a new political vernacular. Israelis used to speak of any withdrawal as "concessions," in return for which Israel must gain something. A peace accord was the goal; withdrawal was the price. Now withdrawal itself became the goal: It is what Israel needs to do to protect its core, a democratic Jewish state.

But then--this was the fourth shock--came the Hamas victory. And, once again, it seemed like the Sharon consensus would collapse. The old logic threatened to reassert itself: withdrawal from Gaza (i.e., "concessions") was rewarded by a new surge of hate. Give them a finger and they'll try to take the whole hand. And so forth. But, yet again, the Sharon-Olmert bloc proved stable: The new center took the rise of Hamas as proof of the new logic. The new logic, after all, was based on the assumption that the Palestinians would not go for a peace deal. Hamas's victory confirmed that they were too recalcitrant for that. Without a partner to cut a deal with, the onus now clearly shifted to Israel to take unilateral measures to establish permanent borders--and thus two states--or else risk a Lebanon-style permanent state of civil war with the Palestinians.

Although the polls predicted a larger victory for Kadima, the election results

nevertheless were momentous: A party that was formed some three months before the elections became Israel's largest, by a wide margin. But perhaps we should be less surprised by the sudden rise of this consensus. Kadima's ideology--Olmert's vision of normality--is actually a return to the older, pre-1967 Zionism. It is no accident that Olmert evokes Ben Gurion so often. For, in Ben Gurion's view, as in Theodor Herzl's before him, colonialism and Zionism cannot be reconciled. Democracy and the universal right of self-determination were not incidental features of Zionism. To become subjects rather than objects of history, Zionists believe, the Jews need to become a self-governing nation. That is, they need to become a nation (as opposed to being only a faith), and that nation must govern itself. This could only come about in a sovereign democratic state. There was no way to implement the plan unless there was one place under the sun where the Jews are a majority.

While Ariel Sharon may have laid the necessary political groundwork from the triumph of this older vision, it fits Olmert like one of his bespoke suits. And it is appropriate that he must carry the burden of executing it.

But can Olmert actually complete this momentous task of remaking Israel? For starters, his project depends on that unpredictable factor, international support. If the international community recognizes Israel's new borders, then a de facto Palestinian state will have been established. If not, then his maneuvers will have amounted to a quick fix, subject to future vicissitudes. Then there's the fractious coalition over which he presides. Though further unilateral withdrawal can muster a majority bloc in Israel's 120-member Knesset, such decisive steps as redrawing borders and uprooting the settler population requires a moral force more powerful than a formal majority. Such a force exists, since many supporters of the moderate right (of Netanyahu's Likud Party and of Avigdor Liberman's Yisrael Beytenu) support some form of unilateral withdrawal. But Netanyahu might return to his historic role of Olmert's nemesis and attempt to exploit the prime minister's bold moves for political gain. He would take advantage of Olmert's precarious majorities and attempt to overthrow his coalition. To pull off this move, Netanyahu and Liberman would ally with the small minority that still wants to resurrect the dream of Greater Israel--and the ultra-Orthodox might join them. It's an extremely plausible strategy that Olmert will need to defuse.

In other words, a great deal will depend on whether Olmert can inspire the current Knesset to rise above party politics and to consider the long-term national interests over the short-term partisan ones. Which is to say, a great deal depends on Olmert himself. There is, indeed, much in his favor. His ideological vision is clear and persuasive--far more so than Sharon's. He is tougher than most Israelis seem to think, and his intellectual power is beyond doubt. He is also well-versed in machine politics. But to turn his vision into reality will require something more than this--something difficult to define, except to say it is always more than the sum of its parts: leadership. So Israel now holds its breath and waits to see if it only elected a mere prime minister or a truly historic figure.

What Does Olmert Want?

New York Review of Books

By Amos Elon

6/22

The Accidental Empire: Israel and the Birth of the Settlements, 1967–1977
by Gershom Gorenberg
Times Books, 454 pp., \$30.00

After weeks of bargaining with smaller parties, each with its own special interests, Ehud Olmert, the leader of the new Kadima party, has finally formed a new Israeli government. The election campaign was overshadowed by the specter of the comatose Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, in the third month of a massive hemorrhagic stroke but still formally in office. Hawks and doves pledged their undying loyalty to his "legacy," whatever it was. Sharon was a reckless, controversial man, exceedingly contradictory— as perhaps many interesting men are; only the dull have simple characters. He was not a man of peace, as President Bush once called him, but out of tune with his time. In an age of decolonization, half a century after the French–Algerian war, he was mainly responsible for the huge "settlement project" in the occupied territories, now often described as the great historical mistake of 1967. The occupied territories continue to fester in Israeli life like a monstrous disease. Their days seem numbered. "I hate the corpses of empires," Rebecca West wrote. "They stink so badly that I cannot believe that even in life they were healthy."

It was a mean little empire, even before the inhabitants became restive. Other colonialists co-opted local elites, intermarried, built universities, great waterworks, and other public amenities for the colonized; Israel did little of the sort. Nearly all real improvements in the territories since 1967 were financed by the Saudis and the Gulf States. In 2001 there was not a single traffic light in the occupied territories. They were a captive market and a source of cheap labor; this was ultimately counterproductive, since it retarded the modernization of the construction and other industries. The settlement project remains a main, some say the main, impediment to a historic compromise to end a hundred-year war between two national movements over the same piece of real estate.

How this mini-empire first came into being after the brief 1967 war is brilliantly described by Gershom Gorenberg in *The Accidental Empire*, his masterly book based on original research. The empire was not founded in a fit of absentmindedness, as was once (wrongly) said of the British Empire, but as Gorenberg's documentation shows, it was the result of deliberate decisions by Israeli governments of the left and the right. In a book that could have served as a telling additional chapter in Barbara Tuchman's *The March of Folly*, he shows how only seven months after the 1967 war there were already eight hundred settlers living in the West Bank. The obsessive drive by all Israeli governments after 1967 to establish "facts on the ground" (the Hebrew translation for *faits accomplis*) was also an almost blind reflex reaction born of past experience—the practice of Israel's founding fathers to add "one dunam after another" and the memory of the UN partition resolution of 1947, which assigned to Israel precisely those parts of Palestine in which many Jews were already living. After the 1948 war, during which some 600,000 Palestinians fled the country or were kicked out, most nations recognized Israel within 78 percent of mandatory Palestine, an area much larger than was allotted it in the original partition resolution.

The settlement project, as Gorenberg shows, was promoted by successive Israeli governments of the left and the right, overriding objections voiced at various times by a minority of cabinet ministers and a handful of dissenters outside the government in the academy and the press. The project was first intended to provide Israel with secure borders, as called for in Security Council Resolution 242, passed after the 1967 war. But soon there was no stopping it. The result, as Gorenberg puts

it, was nothing less than "an artificially created Bosnia." Its first promoters were the secularists Shimon Peres, Moshe Dayan, and Yigael Allon, of whom it was said that after God the Father had been declared dead, they had married the Motherland. The first settlements were modestly called "outposts." Raymond Aron, then visiting Israel, asked Prime Minister Levi Eshkol if he wasn't worried about a rebellion by the Arabs as had happened in Algeria. Gorenberg cites Eshkol's answer: "No. This isn't Algeria. We can strangle terror in the occupied territories."

After Eshkol, other prime ministers including Golda Meir and Yitzhak Rabin promoted the settlement project; but no one was as committed and ruthlessly effective at it as the secular Ariel Sharon—successively minister of housing, infrastructure (such as roads), defense, and finally prime minister. Though Sharon once claimed that he kept Alistair Horne's book on Algeria, *A Savage War of Peace*, on his night table, he must have tragically misunderstood it. That book could not tell him what to do, but it could have told him what not to do. Sharon was called the "great bulldozer" who spread and expanded settlements far and wide, unmindful of their human and political consequences. It is ironic that he was felled by a stroke at the very moment when, succumbing to waves of terror, he tried very late—perhaps too late—to undo, at least partially, what he had wrought in his younger days.

Meanwhile, the terror continues. Some seventy suicide bombers were intercepted so far this year, according to the Israeli army, though one managed to get through and blew himself up in a crowded restaurant in Tel Aviv. He will not be the last. Hell is truth seen too late, as Hobbes said. Sharon was a superb tactician but a terrible strategist. He started a disastrous war in Lebanon which he hoped would eliminate the PLO there just as it had been eliminated in Jordan. I remember first meeting him soon after the 1967 war at a meeting with Haaretz editors: he was still an army general at the time, greatly admired for his victory in a war ominously named after the Six Days of Creation. He tried to convince the editors that Israel must annex all the conquered territories—Sinai peninsula and Gaza Strip, West Bank and Golan Heights. If the Palestinians wanted a state, he said, they could overthrow King Hussein. Jordan should be the Palestinian state; hundreds of thousands of Palestinians already lived there anyway. He convinced few of those present. Forty years old at the time, he was still trim and ruddy with a shock of blond hair. An elderly editorial writer, a man of German origin who had seen the Weimar Republic sink, shook his head and muttered behind me: "Ein Kriegsgott!"—a Teutonic war-god.

The recent election campaign was strangely uneventful, even dull, with little drama and no television debates. Voters knew that Olmert was not Sharon; otherwise they knew little more about him. In a country where as a rule some 80 percent vote, abstention reached an all-time high, almost 40 percent; the abstainers were thought to have mostly been young people fed up with the vacuity and all too frequent corruption of politicians in recent years and by the glaring defects of Israel's proportional electoral system. Not a few youngsters, according to the exit polls, gave their votes, perhaps as a joke, to the octogenarians of a new, maverick "senior citizen" party led by the spymaster who had handled Jonathan Pollard. It won seven seats in the Knesset and the former spymaster became a cabinet minister. All parties, except that of the "senior citizens," were disappointed by the results. In one way or another, all were defeated. Olmert's Kadima, the new "centrist" party that Sharon founded after leaving Likud, also won fewer votes than it had hoped, only twenty-nine seats instead of the forty-one predicted for Sharon before his stroke.

Olmert was forced to turn to religious and other coalition partners who have their own special concerns and do not necessarily share his aims.

Ehud Olmert was until recently a relatively minor figure. Six months ago, few would have regarded him as Sharon's likely successor. If Sharon had suffered a stroke a few weeks earlier, the governing Likud party would not have been split in two and the hawkish Benjamin Netanyahu would be prime minister. Netanyahu's political future now seems dubious. His election slogan, "Olmert will partition Jerusalem: Netanyahu will keep it whole," backfired. His Likud party lost two thirds of its voters, most of them apparently to Kadima. "Jerusalem the Golden," the so-called "heart of the Jewish people" and "rock of our existence," has lost some of its sparkle. There now seems to be much more support even for the re-partition of Jerusalem than was assumed in the past.

Olmert has had a variable, hardly inspiring career in Israeli politics. From a family that had supported the right-wing Irgun terrorists in the 1930s and 1940s, he was, in the months following the 1967 war, a fiercely partisan hawk. He was a member of several right-wing splinter groups and is said to have coined one of their slogans: "Liberated Land/Remains Forever in our Hand," a rhyme as clumsy in Hebrew as it is in English. In 1973 he was the youngest man ever elected to the Knesset. As mayor of Jerusalem in the late 1990s he became a national figure but provoked a disaster by recklessly ordering the opening of an ancient Herodian tunnel close to the Muslim holy places on the ancient Temple Mount. This caused a predictable three-day battle between Muslim protesters and the police, leaving seventy-nine Palestinians dead and hundreds wounded. On the second day the army had to be called in. Fourteen Israeli soldiers also died. The Palestinians suspected, as they frequently do, that the Jews were about to destroy the mosques and rebuild the Jewish Temple where it had stood almost two thousand years ago.

It was the worst massacre of its kind in East Jerusalem since its occupation by Israel in the 1967 war. Olmert's wife, Aliza, an artist known for her support of the leftist Peace Now, recently told an interviewer that the incident had caused the most serious crisis in their thirty-year marriage. Their children share their mother's political views. One son refused service in the Israeli army. Before the recent elections, she said, she had never voted for her husband. Now she had done so, because, she said, Olmert had undergone "a deep change." She was only sorry it had not happened thirty years earlier.

Olmert's new cabinet took office in early May. Israel has always been a small country with large government cabinets. The new cabinet may become the largest in Israel's history, as large as China's, a commentator complained. Predictably, it has no Israeli-Palestinian members; more surprising, it has no ministers from the Russian émigré party that now claims to represent approximately one million Israelis. The two strong men in the new cabinet are Olmert and Labor's Amir Peretz, the new defense minister. A militant trade-unionist, Peretz is a newcomer to national politics. He and Olmert come from opposite poles, politically and socially. Peretz is the son of Moroccan immigrants who grew up in a grim new town on the edge of the Gaza Strip; Olmert is the son of one of Israel's established and well-to-do families, a prominent lawyer, and a multimillionaire. Still, as Daniel Ben-Simon recently wrote in Haaretz, for all their differences—blue collar vs. white collar, dove vs. hawk, periphery vs. center—Olmert and Peretz may turn out to be a compatible pair. Even though Peretz's Labor won only nineteen seats, many see in their partnership

something hopeful; it's not yet clear why, perhaps because otherwise there seems little basis for hope.

Peretz took over the dying Labor Party from the perennial candidate Shimon Peres, now eighty-two, an opportunist who never won a national election in his life and, on losing the party leadership to Peretz, jumped over to Kadima to be rewarded with a purely nominal cabinet job. At the swearing-in, the often-concealed character of Israeli party politics came to light when it was officially announced that Peres has, in his lawyer's safe, a signed agreement with Olmert whose contents remain secret. One can hope it has to do with the need to make peace and not with Peres's future power in the new government.

Peretz is the first Labor leader in many years who is not a former general, the first who has been a dove throughout his political life, the first who did not run on a "security first" platform as did all his predecessors, from Ben-Gurion to Rabin, Barak, and Sharon. Instead, Peretz promised voters to cut the bloated defense budget. Rather than spend money on settlements, Peretz said, he would spend it to fight poverty, raise the minimum wage, and increase old-age pensions that had been savagely cut by the previous Likud government.

Peretz did not hide his distaste for the dozen or so retired generals in the upper echelons of the Labor Party and took only one of them with him into the new cabinet. Peretz has made clear his view that in past years the Israeli military establishment has been overly aggressive in its attitudes. It opposed, at least initially, most peace initiatives, including Sadat's visit to Jerusalem and the Oslo agreement.

Olmert's first weeks in full power were in some ways encouraging. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has for years been a matter of mutual vengeance, of ceaseless "payback" and settling scores. The prevailing sentiment was, "We can't keep silent or do nothing. If we don't retaliate they'll feel free to do it again." Olmert, at least during the first few weeks, stopped the process of reflexively administering vengeance. He resisted the wild talk of "punishing" the new Hamas government in Gaza for the continued firing of ineffective, homemade, primitive Kassam rockets from Gaza in the direction of Israel. They land in open fields and cause little if any damage. At least during the first few weeks in office, perhaps under the influence of a new dovish defense minister, he refrained from firing back, but soon reverted to the old practice and authorized the targeted assassination of two Hamas leaders in the Gaza Strip. But he resisted demands to punish Iran for President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's threats to wipe Israel off the map. He still hopes that Egypt and Jordan do the work of repression for him and enjoys the considerably improved relations with the Europeans.

In this respect, nothing better could have happened to Olmert than the victory of Hamas in the recent Palestinian elections. In one blow, it improved Israel's standing abroad. Olmert is content to let the United States, the UN, and the Europeans punish Hamas for its continued refusal to denounce violence, disarm terrorists, and recognize not only Israel but all past Palestinian agreements with Israel as well. Speaking on Israeli television early in April, President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt asked Israel to be patient with Hamas: "Give them time. There was a time when Egypt too wished to throw you into the sea.... And where are you now? In the sea?" But then Mubarak too imposed new restrictions on Palestinians traveling from Gaza to Egypt, and his foreign minister never found time to meet with the new Palestinian foreign minister.

Jordan and Saudi Arabia also refuse to receive the Hamas foreign minister. Even Arab banks have succumbed to US and Israeli pressure not to transmit funds to the Palestinians. For his part, Olmert at first refused to transfer to the Palestinians customs and other fees for goods imported by the Palestinians from abroad, withheld by Israel. Only on May 11, when the Palestinians' lack of funds caused food shortages and a rising humanitarian crisis in Gaza and elsewhere, did Olmert relent and turn over some of the withheld funds to the Palestinian Authority. At the same time, Olmert's government agreed with the decision of the Quartet—the US, the UN, the EU, and Russia—to give further humanitarian support to the Palestinian Authority. Still, Olmert continues to ignore Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, who keeps inviting Israel to renew peace talks. Olmert says Abbas by now is not an effective partner for peace. He may be right. Gaza and the West Bank seem on the verge of civil war between Hamas and other factions. In mid-May, Palestinian sources claimed that Hamas members were plotting to kill Abbas.

Olmert's immediate plan is to "disengage" from the Palestinians—if need be unilaterally—by withdrawing from parts of the occupied territories, to still-unspecified lines but not, as the Palestinians still insist, to the pre-1967 demarcation lines. Olmert promises to try to obtain the consent of the settlers and the agreement of the Palestinians to a new border marked by the wall being built on the West Bank, but if that consent is not forthcoming, as seems most likely, he would seek at least the agreement of friendly governments in Europe as well as the US. This idea was originally Sharon's, although some say it was formulated under Olmert's influence.

"Withdrawal" is still a dirty word in Israel. Olmert carefully avoids it. He prefers the sanitized terms "disengagement," "convergence," or, more often lately, *hitkansut*, a Hebrew word that defies translation, implying a closing of ranks within the warm bosom of the family. In the recent campaign, Olmert won at least as many votes for promising *hitkansut* as Netanyahu lost for opposing it. Peretz speaks of a "break with the past."

At present, there are three obvious obstacles to Olmert's plan. The first is parliamentary. Lacking a clear Kadima majority, he hesitates to rely solely on the few Arab and leftist members of the Knesset who would, in any case, give him only a very narrow margin; he still hopes for a considerable majority to push his "convergence" through. For this he needs religious and other coalition partners that do not support the scheme, or do so only partially. The second hitch is international. Olmert plans to evacuate within two or three years some 70,000 settlers from the more remote or isolated settlements, leaving the rest—more than 400,000 settlers—where they are. This will not be easy, especially if the economic sanctions on the Palestinians continue to lead to new waves of terror. One of Olmert's closest aides is on the record as saying that the Palestinians must be put on a "diet: ...make them hungry but don't make them die of hunger." And yet making them hungry and broke, I heard one Israeli expert on Arabs say, will not make them nicer, only more lean and more mean. The same aide said that the "convergence" plan will put the proposed Palestinian state "in formaldehyde." The Palestinians, he said, will get their state only when they become Finns.

According to Olmert's plan, the evacuated settlers from the more remote settlements would be resettled elsewhere in the occupied West Bank, somewhere behind the five-meter-high wall with its fortified rows of barbed wire, searchlights, death zones, electronic alerts, digital cameras, etc. Some might live near the large existing

settlements which, as George W. Bush, in a much-publicized letter to Sharon, has already said, it would be unrealistic to evacuate.

The problem here is that for this new border to gain legitimacy, i.e., permanence, it must be confirmed by the other side. Unilateral steps create neither legitimacy nor security. This was shown a few years ago after Israel withdrew from southern Lebanon. The withdrawal was successful because Israel had withdrawn to the internationally recognized border, and the Israel–Lebanon border is now as quiet as it had not been for years.

The government has recently invited contractors to submit bids for the construction, on accelerated schedule, of new homes for the evacuees in their new locations elsewhere on the West Bank, where they will be protected by the new wall. When completed, the wall will run 759 kilometers. It will then be three times longer than the Israeli–Jordanian border before 1967, enclosing the Jewish state inside one enormous bunker.

The third obstacle is that the new wall will cut off some 200,000 Palestinians in Greater Jerusalem from their relatives, their natural hinterland, their universities, public institutions, businesses, workshops, and the property they own on the West Bank. Tens of thousands of other Palestinians on either side of the wall will be cut off from their orange and olive groves and their fields.

In his inaugural speech, Olmert continued to insist that Israel has inalienable historical rights for all the land west of the Jordan River; and yet he made it clear that repartitioning the country is inevitable because of what has often been called the "demographic time bomb." By 2030, perhaps earlier, there would be a Palestinian majority west of the Jordan. Without partition, Israel's very existence as a Jewish state would be in danger. The currently "spread-out settlements," he said in his inaugural, "threaten the existence of the state."

Asked why the possibility of a Palestinian majority had not occurred to him before—"has not this been obvious for years?"—he said that he had expected more Jewish immigrants to come to Israel, especially from the former Soviet Union; but only a million came. He wants Israel to finally become, as he put it, a normal country, where it will be "fun" to live without the sword of a certain Palestinian majority by 2030 hanging overhead. There will be no Israelis left on the other side of the great wall, he promised. The wall is planned to enclose Greater Jerusalem and most of the main settlement blocks in the West Bank. It will extend deep into the West Bank as far as Maale Adumim, a settlement of 32,000 inhabitants halfway down to Jericho, and in the west to the large city of Ariel, twenty kilometers inside the West Bank. This will not only divide Palestinian Jerusalem residents from their families and businesses outside the city but will, in effect, cut the West Bank into at least two enclaves. Olmert also wants to retain freedom of action in the remaining West Bank against terrorists and maintain a "military presence" in the Jordan Valley. Israel will therefore establish a security zone along the river that will further cut into the West Bank, taking up a considerable amount of territory. The Jordanian government, forever suspicious of Palestinians, reportedly favors such a presence.

There are now close to half a million Israeli settlers in the occupied territories, including Jerusalem, lured there either by intense faith in religious nationalism, tax incentives, cheaper housing, or all three. Most commute daily to work in Israel proper. Approximately one half live in the former East Jerusalem and its immediate

outskirts, annexed in 1967 by an act of parliament. Greater Jerusalem now covers a huge area and is a mixed, ostensibly "united" city today of Israelis and Palestinians. The latter continue to boycott elections to the "united" municipality. The new Israeli suburbs built after the 1967 war in Arab neighborhoods within and beyond the old demarcation line are neat, well-kept, and occasionally even luxurious. Because they were heavily subsidized and built on expropriated private and public land, housing prices there have traditionally been as much as a third cheaper than in the former Israeli-held West Jerusalem. By contrast, Palestinians were at first encouraged to emigrate and later prevented from buying apartments in the new Israeli suburbs. The municipal government still badly neglects the remaining purely Palestinian neighborhoods. Many are sadly run down. Behind the Mount of Olives and in the Valley of Hinom, below the Old City walls, the Palestinian quarters look more like Cairo slums. Mountains of garbage lie in the street, there are potholes everywhere, no sidewalks, no proper streetlights, and no parks, as there are on the Jewish side. An open sewer runs through muddy streets.

The new Israeli suburbs on the Palestinian side of the old demarcation line now reach almost to the outskirts of Ramallah in the north and Bethlehem in the south. Some people still speak as though it were still possible to redivide Greater Jerusalem neatly along ethnic lines. They must have looked at old maps. Anyone driving today through the new Israeli districts, which are widely dispersed north and east, notices immediately that many of them seem inextricably linked with those of the Palestinians. Large pockets of Israeli suburbs are surrounded by larger Palestinian residential neighborhoods, and vice versa. It is difficult to see how these interlocked areas can be disentangled and redivided.

The former deputy mayor of Jerusalem Meron Benvenisti was right when he warned twenty years ago that the settlement project would soon be irreversible ("it's ten minutes before twelve," he warned). Many Israeli doves mocked him at the time for his gloomy views. Abba Eban wrote a brochure to refute Benvenisti's argument and it was published by the Center for Peace in the Middle East. But Benvenisti was right. Israel had been warned early on that the settlements violated international law by, among others, the United States, and early in the fall of 1967, even by the legal adviser of the Israeli foreign ministry, who later became a judge on the International Court in The Hague. The warnings were ignored.

I spent a couple of days recently visiting settlements on the West Bank with Danny Rubinstein, the veteran Haaretz commentator on West Bank affairs. Most settlers live in the 190 "authorized" settlements built on land expropriated from private Arab owners or on so-called "public" (i.e., unowned) land, though it is difficult to distinguish private from public land in a territory where no official record of land ownership was ever made. The British mandatory government and the Jordanian government had never gotten around to clarifying titles and property. Land was traditionally held by clans according to informal understandings. Ownership was based on old deeds and on tradition. After 1967, the Israeli military government freely interpreted the legal situation in its own interest. Large areas seized for alleged "security" reasons ended up as Israeli civilian settlements. Conquerors frequently construe the law in their own interest, as was the case in America, where, according to Stuart Banner, a professor at UCLA, the Indians lost much of their land largely because of a continuing divergence between law and practice.

The "authorized" new Israeli settlements sparkle with nice-looking villas and cottages and lavish community centers paid for by the profits of the national lottery. There

are shopping malls surrounded by planted cypresses and frequently sprinkled green lawns and private swimming pools within sight of Palestinian villages where water is still brought in twice a week by tankers or trucks. It soon becomes clear to a visitor that the inhabitants of most of the settlements remain convinced that they and their descendants will stay there forever. In the more remote settlements now scheduled for evacuation, and in the so-called "unauthorized", i.e., wild settlements, the talk is bitter. I often heard the slogan "We were thrown out by the Nazis but they won't be able to kick us out from here."

Much of the West Bank remains a war zone. The Israeli military presence is considerable, with many round, armored pillboxes, or bulletproof towers, overlooking the main Palestinian villages; the towers have slots for observation or shooting, with tall antennas and large Israeli flags hanging on high masts. "Hardened" SUVs are parked outside, ready for instant intervention. Inland from the big wall itself, I saw several new lower walls, built by the army, that now run parallel to local roads and can be used to block easy escape routes for potential terrorist cars.

Everywhere between Jerusalem and Hebron and between Jerusalem and Nablus, one encounters astonishing displays of outsized Israeli flags, glaring manifestations of sovereignty in the heart of a hostile population; I never saw that many flags in previous years. You see them at every road-block, around every settlement, on every possible lamppost, and on high barbed wire fences. Almost everywhere there are completely separate road networks: one network for Israelis only, and another for Palestinians, with tunnels and overpasses enabling Israeli commuters to reach Jerusalem or Tel Aviv without meeting—or often seeing—a single Palestinian. The road network reserved for Israelis is brand new. The settler roads are smooth, broad, and well lit at night. The Palestinian roads are often old and full of potholes, and there are checkpoints every twenty or thirty kilometers. At peak times Palestinian cars, often including ambulances, can wait for hours at a checkpoint. The newest checkpoints are ingeniously designed so that there is no direct contact between the Palestinians and the Israelis who examine the Palestinians' papers through slots in steel doors, using scanners linked to "wanted" lists.

In addition to the 190 "authorized" settlements, there are more than a hundred "unauthorized" ones, though for most of them the Israeli state has supplied housing and asphalt access roads as well as electricity and water lines. Just how this was done remains obscure. A cabal of politicians, bureaucrats, real estate speculators, and sympathetic military governors, many of them settlers themselves who lived nearby, must have lent a helping hand. The state also, as a matter of course, assigns squads of four or five soldiers to protect each settlement, whether authorized or not, and surrounds all of them with three rings of high barbed wire, powerful searchlights, and electronic alert systems. In addition, everything in the radius of three or four hundred meters of a settlement is declared a "special security zone" and Palestinians are warned not to enter them.

Then there are the smaller settlements, so-called outposts. They are frequently populated by violent, heavily armed young men who often harass the neighboring Palestinian farmers to make them move away. In many cases farmers have been beaten and their huts burned; at one place I visited in the hills south of Hebron, a Palestinian farmer told me that the settlers had thrown rat poison into the sheds where he keeps his sheep and goats; they bulldozed a field where he had been growing vegetables and fodder. Children walking to school in the nearby village were harassed daily. When I was there, volunteers from Swedish and Chicago human

rights groups confirmed the farmer's story. They now come every morning to accompany the children to school.

Several such cases were reported in 2005 by B'tzelem, the Israeli human rights group. The police were informed but no charges were made. An official Ministry of Justice inquiry strongly criticized the aggressive behavior of these settlers and called for dismantling unauthorized settlements and outposts; but nothing has been done.

Convincing 70,000 remote or "unauthorized" settlers to relocate will be difficult but many think it will be possible. It might, I heard, cost about ten times as much as the evacuation of seven thousand settlers from Gaza, or between \$15 and \$20 billion. There will be stormy demonstrations, but if evacuation takes place it will have been made possible politically, thanks largely to the former prime minister, now comatose in a Jerusalem hospital. Shortly before he suffered a stroke, his notion of hitkansut had become part of a consensus wider than at any time since 1967. Even the settlement of Beth-Arye, on the hills of Samaria overlooking the narrow Israeli coastal plain, will be emptied, I was told. For years it was known as "Sharon's Terrace" because he used to take prominent foreigners there to show them why Israel can never give up the West Bank. George W. Bush too, while still governor of Texas, was taken there by Sharon in his helicopter. Looking west through Sharon's binoculars toward the sea and southwest through the haze to the skyscrapers in Tel Aviv, hearing Sharon's argument that the settlement could not be removed, Bush allegedly told Sharon: "I can understand that. It would be sheer madness."

Thanks in part to Sharon, relatively little is now left of the old, secular hard-line right so prominent in Menachem Begin's days and again in 2001 after the outbreak of the second intifada, when the voters gave Sharon's Likud the largest majority in its history. The old Likud from which Sharon split away a few weeks before his stroke was decimated in the recent election and has become a marginal party of only eleven deputies. The country seems to have become centrist.

The secular supporters of a Greater Israel, once so vocal, are now hardly heard from. The demonstrators who protested the evacuation of Gaza a few months ago were nearly all settlers or religious fanatics. The ideological momentum for the Greater Israel, as David Landau recently observed in Haaretz, now comes almost exclusively from religious fundamentalists in the settlements: men obsessed with God's promise to Abraham in the Bronze Age or with the messianic promise—or perhaps with both. For them the boundaries between the prophetic vision and the realpolitik of the modern Jewish state remain as fuzzy as they have always been since 1967. But they won only nine seats.

Even the secular, quasi-fascist Israel Is Our Home party, supported mainly by xenophobic Russian immigrants and led by Netanyahu's former crony Victor Liebermann, does not oppose Olmert's hitkansut; but since even within Israel proper, the rate of reproduction of Palestinian-Israeli citizens is already almost double that of Jewish Israelis, Liebermann demands that in exchange for evacuating West Bank settlers an equal number of Palestinian-Israeli citizens be expelled as well.

Will the Palestinians of Hamas and Fatah be content with what Olmert may offer them? They feel very strongly that even before the 1967 war they had already lost to the Israelis 78 percent of historic Palestine. Getting the remaining 22 percent back—i.e., practically all of the West Bank and including the former "East Jerusalem"—is

the absolute minimum they say they can accept. Then there is the question of timing, which has always been of vital importance in this conflict. Several opportunities were missed in the past. At first the Israelis were ready to make peace but the Palestinians were not. Then the Palestinians were ready but the Israelis delayed. In 1967, the main Palestinian politicians in the West Bank were ready to make peace if Israel agreed to the establishment of a demilitarized Palestinian state. This was before the rise of Arafat and the PLO. Israel would not hear of it. General Dayan believed Israel could remain in the West Bank forever so long as its regime was humane and economically in the interest of the natives.

As Gorenberg's book makes clear, the strange naiveté of Dayan led him to believe that new fertilizers and improved water supply systems would induce Palestinians to consent to Israeli rule. In its 1978 peace treaty with Egypt, Israel, under Menahem Begin, recognized the "legitimate rights" of the Palestinians and agreed to "full autonomy" for the Palestinians but Begin dragged out the negotiations with the Egyptians on this issue until they—who did not care much about Palestinians anyway—tired of it and suspended the talks.

The truth is that Begin was convinced that in the peace treaty with Egypt he had traded the Sinai peninsula for a free hand in the West Bank. Two years after the signing of the peace treaty, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, then the Egyptian deputy foreign minister, told me in an interview: "Israel is cheating! It is not granting autonomy to the Palestinians." I said: "Why do you say cheating? Begin never made a secret of how he felt about the West Bank." Boutros-Ghali said: "Yes, but [then Defense Minister Ezer] Weizman assured us that all Begin wants in the West Bank was a mere fig leaf." "Funny," I said, "that's exactly what Weizman told Begin about your attitude to this issue. Throw him a fig leaf, he always told Begin." Boutros-Ghali laughed.

Simultaneously, Begin launched the largest settlement drive in the West Bank and Gaza to date: Sharon was in charge of this. A few years later he authorized Sharon to invade Lebanon and lay siege to Arafat's headquarters in Beirut. It would be, he told President Reagan, like catching Hitler in his bunker. Timing, or the lack of it, remained crucial. The Oslo agreement of 1993 might not have collapsed if Arafat had done more to prevent suicide attacks and Israel hadn't accelerated the settlement program, or if Sharon had not provoked Palestinian violence through his disastrous visit to the Temple Mount in 2000. Before the recent electoral victory of Hamas, a deal with Mahmoud Abbas—an avowed opponent of all Palestinian violence—was perhaps still conceivable. Sharon insisted that Abbas was "no partner."

Some observers now point to the fact that Hamas declared a "calm" (tayahdia) in 2005, which it still largely observes; but its Palestinian competitors—Hezbollah and Islamic Jihad—go on bombing. After the victory of Hamas, the Palestinians are much less likely to consent to a deal that Abbas himself had already rejected with an adversary that Hamas leaders do not recognize and who refuses to talk with them. Unfortunately, it took almost forty years to begin withdrawing from where Israel should not have been in the first place. In the meantime, a purely local clash became part of a menacing "clash of civilizations."

The US has recently been urging Olmert to go slow on his plan to act unilaterally, at least until it becomes clear that the continuing international pressure on Hamas is not working. The US has different priorities from those of Israel. It would certainly welcome any Israeli withdrawal from occupied territory, but its first concern at the

moment is to prevent the spread of chaos in the West Bank and Gaza. With terror bound to continue, Israel's situation remains precarious, and that of the walled-in Palestinians becomes darker than ever.

A Bitter Prize

Foreign Affairs

By Tom Segev

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The Accidental Empire: Israel and the Birth of the Settlements. Gershom Gorenberg. : Times Books, 2006, 480 pp.\$30.00

On June 13, 1967, a small group of Israelis traveled to an area south of Jerusalem. The land, on the west bank of the Jordan River, had just been conquered by the Israeli army in the Six-Day War, as had East Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip, and the Golan Heights.

The visitors were looking for the remains of a group of Jewish villages known as Gush Etzion, which the Arabs had occupied and destroyed during Israel's War of Independence, in 1948. For the intervening 19 years, the West Bank had been under Jordanian control. But the survivors of Gush Etzion had never given up hope of returning, and now they planned to stay. So did the Israelis who, around the same time, moved into the newly occupied Golan Heights and Jerusalem's Old City -- forcing out hundreds of Arab families.

Today, nearly 40 years later, about 250,000 Israelis live in some 125 officially recognized West Bank settlements. Another 180,000 live in the annexed areas of East Jerusalem, and about 16,000 live in the Golan.

The most comprehensive book on these settlers is *Lords of the Land*, by the journalist Akiva Eldar and the historian Idith Zertal, which was published in Hebrew in 2005. *Lords of the Land* describes Israel's settlement of the occupied territories as the result of political and emotional pressure that the settlers skillfully applied to a largely unenthusiastic but weak Israeli government. Now, Gershom Gorenberg, in a careful and fluently written book, has produced a much more sophisticated analysis. In *The Accidental Empire*, Gorenberg depicts the settlements as the product not just of political maneuvering, but also of the Israeli identity itself. Settling the land had always been at the core of the Zionist experience, but by 1967, when the Six-Day War began, many Israelis had lost their confidence in the old Zionist dream. Israel's smashing battlefield success in the war reversed this trend, galvanizing many Israelis into taking up the Zionist mantle once again and making a fresh beginning in the newly captured land.

Gorenberg, a U.S.-born Israeli and a columnist and editor for the English-language *Jerusalem Report*, presents this drama with impressive skill. He fails, however, to accompany it with a clear analysis of how and why these settlements went from being an expression of Zionist enthusiasm to an existential hazard and a moral burden for the country.

THE UNNECESSARY OCCUPATION

Although the Six-Day War resulted in the occupation of Gaza, the Golan, and the West Bank, grabbing the West Bank was hardly Israel's priority when the fighting began; at the time, most Israelis probably would have settled for peace on the basis of the 1949 armistice lines.

Many Israelis, however, had never stopped dreaming of a Greater Israel. Some justified their desire for more territory on strategic grounds; others were motivated more by national and religious sentiments. Although they remained outside the mainstream, both camps exerted considerable moral and political influence during Israel's first 20 years.

Gorenberg writes with great insight about such forces, including radicals within the ruling Labor movement who had opposed the idea of partition since the 1920s and continued to do so after Israel's independence. He quotes leading rabbis who prayed that the Jews would recapture the Western Wall and other holy sites that had fallen under Jordanian control in 1949. He gives scant attention, however, to another important force: Menachem Begin's right-wing Herut (Freedom) Party, which, after 1948, did more than any other group to keep the hope for a Greater Israel on the political agenda. As a member of the war cabinet, which was hastily formed in June 1967, Begin played a major part in the fateful decision to occupy East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza.

This decision was by no means a natural or necessary consequence of the war. In 1967, the primary military threat to Israel came from Egypt. This threat, however, was effectively eliminated during the first hour of the war, when the Israeli Air Force wiped out almost all of Egypt's warplanes before they even took off. From that point on, Israel no longer had reason to fear for its existence. Why, then, did it nevertheless proceed to occupy the West Bank? Only six months before the war, Israeli intelligence experts had warned the government against seizing the area, since doing so would require Israel to control a large, hostile Palestinian population. Yet the government ignored this advice. True, the Jordanian army provoked Israel by disregarding warnings not to shell the Israeli sections of Jerusalem. But fending off Jordan's attack did not require occupying the West Bank. Taking that land was an irrational act contrary to Israel's national interest.

The explanation for this folly seems to lie in the euphoria that seized Israel's war cabinet following the quick military conquest on the Egyptian front. Reason and strategy were forgotten. None of Israel's government ministers even asked whether it was really in the nation's interest to seize the West Bank and Jerusalem's Old City; the value of such land was treated as self-evident.

Victory, in fact, seems to have driven the entire country into a frenzy. Many Israelis acted as though they had been miraculously rescued from annihilation and had reached the age of redemption; they interpreted winning as a sign from God. The army's own chief rabbi, Shlomo Goren, demanded that the mosques on the Temple Mount be blown up; David Ben-Gurion (Israel's first prime minister) wanted the Old City's walls destroyed; and Prime Minister Levi Eshkol seriously considered transferring hundreds of thousands of Palestinians out of the territories and to Iraq.

SHOCK AND AWE

After the war, the Israeli cabinet split over how to proceed. On one side stood the doves, led by Finance Minister Pinhas Sapir, who favored returning most of the captured land for peace; on the other were the hawks, including Begin, Deputy Prime

Minister Yigal Allon, and Defense Minister Moshe Dayan, who wanted to keep most of the land. Eshkol himself was indecisive and hesitant. And Israel's citizens were divided over what to do. The majority agreed, however, that East Jerusalem and Gaza should be permanently incorporated into Israel, and most also favored keeping at least a section of the West Bank.

The idea of settling these lands came from deep within Zionism. The notion of shiva (return) is firmly rooted in Jewish and Zionist tradition. According to the Zionist vision, the state of Israel was born when the Jews returned from exile to the land of their biblical forebears, and many Israelis felt they had an unchallengeable right to the land -- all of it. The settlement ethos had been the cornerstone of Zionism ever since the first pioneers came to live in the area.

Gorenberg points to another, novel source for the zeal that drove Israel's new settlers after 1967. Writing with neither contempt nor approval, he draws on in-depth conversations he had with many of these settlers, whose experiences he places in the context of the unrest that marked the late 1960s in Europe and the United States. The young people around the world who went on to found the New Left suffered from an "illegitimacy complex," Gorenberg writes: raised in comfortable surroundings on stories of their parents' Old Left heroism, the generation of 1968 (or, in Israel's case, 1967) must have felt like failures. Israeli schoolchildren had been weaned on stories of prestate pioneers braving Arab and British antagonism; their own lives seemed soft in comparison. By the 1960s, when these people were coming of age, Israel's early challenges seemed to be fading, and the Zionist drama was being replaced by Israeli routine. Many young Israelis felt that their country had stopped offering them mythological adventures; not only did immigration to Israel virtually cease during this time, but thousands of young Israelis began leaving the country for good, most settling in the United States.

According to Gorenberg, the victory of 1967 changed all that. Many young Israelis suddenly discovered a "New Zionism," just as young people elsewhere were discovering a New Left. Radicals but not revolutionaries, these new settlers regarded themselves as disciples of the early Zionist pioneers. And like their role models, many of them chose to farm the new land: agriculture was seen not merely as a way of life, but as a moral and patriotic calling.

Although Gorenberg's parallel between the New Left and the New Zionism is interesting and original, it explains little in the larger context of Israeli history. To be sure, Israel did experience its own generational crisis in the 1960s. But the struggle there never became part of the apocalyptic upheaval that shook the industrialized West. Moreover, Israelis continued to settle the West Bank long after the fervor of the 1960s had faded; indeed, they continue to do so today.

Understanding the settlers, in fact, does not require a generational thesis. Many of them were religious and were driven by messianic nationalism. Indeed, as Gorenberg explains, the triumph of 1967 had the effect of turning messianism into a mainstream belief among some religious Israelis, particularly young ones. Like their more secular kibbutznik colleagues, the New Zionists believed that Jews must shed their supposed weakness, return to the land, and embrace physical labor and military strength. But after 1967, these New Zionists refused to relinquish traditional Judaism in the process (as the kibbutzniks had). The events of 1967, in other words, created a new fusion of Israeli patriotism and religious faith, producing a particularly fanatical brand of settlers in the process.

A POISON PILL

Regrettably, by limiting himself to the first decade after the war, Gorenberg largely misses the story of the nonideological settlers who came later. The religious die-hards were not the only ones to relocate to the territories after 1967. Many Israelis moved into new housing projects in East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza simply because homes were cheaper there and the settlements offered a higher quality of life than they could afford elsewhere. A large portion of these settlers were new immigrants to Israel, especially from the Soviet bloc, who saw little difference between Israel proper and the occupied territories.

Gorenberg's limited focus also restricts his attention to the Labor governments of Eshkol, Golda Meir, and Yitzhak Rabin. Gorenberg seems to accept the conventional view that these prime ministers permitted the settlements not out of any innate enthusiasm for the project, but as a way to keep themselves in power. In Israeli memory, Gorenberg writes, Begin's rise to the prime ministership in 1977 is often seen as the moment when settlement building began in earnest. But "a more accurate description" of Begin's policy, Gorenberg argues, "would be an escalation of existing trends."

This claim is not quite right. Although by 1977 settlers had already started moving into the territories, at that point they numbered less than 60,000, and about 40,000 of them lived in East Jerusalem. These numbers increased dramatically under Begin, creating a new strategic reality. By ignoring this period, Gorenberg provides only the first half of the settlement story. The second half has been much more disastrous.

Still, Gorenberg is right to emphasize Labor's significant role. The truth is that all Israeli governments encouraged the settlements, as did most Israelis. After all, in every post-1967 election, Israelis were offered a selection of anti-settlement parties, but they never voted them into office. Instead, they chose governments that acted against Israel's national interest and that violated a long tradition of Zionist restraint.

Although the Zionist movement had long advocated settlement, it had always done so with one major caveat: capturing more territory would mean serious demographic dangers. Accordingly, the movement had adopted a basic strategy known as "maximum land, minimum Arabs," and most of its thinkers had favored maintaining a solid Jewish majority in Jewish-controlled land over ruling vast areas populated by Arabs.

Gorenberg fails to explain what led so many Israelis to abandon this logic after the Six-Day War. To be fair, it is a difficult question; the answer cannot be reduced to colonialist hunger or fundamentalist religious faith. Strategic considerations alone are also not sufficient explanation. The real answer probably lies in the paradox inherent in the Zionist dream itself, which, in order to be realized, must be partly abandoned. Zionism holds that all of the biblical Promised Land belongs to the Jewish people. But Zionism is also a democratic vision. Many of its proponents have long recognized that to maintain a viable state that is both Jewish and democratic, they must give up territory populated largely by Arabs; incorporating these areas into Israel would make Israel less Jewish, less democratic, or both. For years, Israelis have struggled with the questions of where to draw the line and, as Gorenberg's book highlights, how much new land can be settled without endangering Israel's Jewish and democratic character.

Gorenberg maintains that the settlements have "undone the [1949] partition of the contested land" such that Jews and Arabs now live "intermixed" in the same territory. This is a curious way of describing the constant violence that surrounds the settlements and the harsh oppression of the Palestinians they entail. According to Gorenberg, "While the settlements are not the only reason that diplomatic efforts to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have been frustrated, they have complicated the task of drawing new partition lines as part of such a resolution." This is an understatement -- in fact, the settlements have become a major obstacle to any reasonable agreement between Israel and the Palestinians.

The settlements have also caused more harm than Gorenberg acknowledges, to Palestinians and Israelis alike. Financially, settlement building has eaten up considerable resources that could have been used to improve social services in Israel proper. As a consequence, in recent years the quality of Israel's educational and health services -- once among the state's major achievements -- has dropped. Big pockets of poverty have replaced social equality, another erstwhile source of pride.

At the same time, continued human rights violations in the occupied territories have brutalized Israeli society in almost all spheres and badly damaged Israel's image abroad. The conflict has also dangerously deepened the rift between Jewish and Arab citizens of Israel. And it has led to repeated waves of Palestinian terrorism and Israeli reprisals, which have killed thousands of Israelis and Palestinians.

Since 1967, more and more Israelis have come to understand the risks of occupation, which is why most Israelis supported the dramatic event that Gorenberg uses to close his book: Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's August 2005 pullout from Gaza. But Gorenberg, noncommittal to the end, carefully avoids judging the wisdom of Sharon's move. "It may be recorded as the act that revived peace efforts," he writes, "or as the intermezzo before a new battle over the torn land."

Nobody will ever know where Sharon, who suffered a massive stroke in late 2005, would have taken the Israeli-Palestinian conflict next. It is unlikely, however, that he would have come to terms with the Palestinians, especially after Hamas swept the Palestinian legislative elections in January. All his life, Sharon has regarded the Palestinians as enemies, not potential partners. The unilateral pullout from Gaza was the act of a general withdrawing under fire, not that of a statesman suddenly operating in the name of peace.

Nevertheless, the pullout was the first evacuation of settlements from what is considered to be the biblical land of Israel. Breaking that almost sacred taboo may be Sharon's most important achievement. Some withdrawal from the West Bank is now likely to follow, although certain settlements (especially around Jerusalem) are unlikely to disappear. Such changes may not resolve the conflict, but they might make life somewhat easier for both Palestinians and Israelis. Israelis can thank Sharon for showing them that giving up settlements can be relatively painless; although the Gaza settlers themselves suffered considerable hardship, the rest of the country experienced no national trauma. In the long run, the Gaza settlements will have left no imprint on Israel's national endeavor; in the history of Zionism, they hardly deserve a footnote. If anything, dismantling them may have been the first step in a return to the Zionist realism that Israel abandoned after 1967.

HEZBOLLAH

Target: Hezbollah

National Review

By David Pryce-Jones

6/5

Iran, as its president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said in his recent letter to George W. Bush, is hearing the sounds of "the shattering and fall of the ideology and thoughts of the liberal democratic systems." That is a general threat to the international order. With astonishing and obsessive regularity, Ahmadinejad rehearses a particular promise to wipe out Israel. According to most experts, Iran will complete its nuclear program within a period of one to three years, four at most. The regime asserts that this program is solely for peaceful purposes, but it is flagrantly breaking the nuclear-nonproliferation rules. Suspicion and fear of its intentions are further justified by the terror and deceit it has practiced since 1979, the year of Iran's Islamic revolution.

A Third World pre-industrialized country, Iran should in reality be a regional power at best, but evidently Ahmadinejad sees himself mobilizing Muslims everywhere -- not just fellow Shiites, but Sunnis as well -- for a clash of civilizations that he is sure to win, with God on his side. His belligerence appears to be actively inviting attack from liberal democracies -- and first of all Israel -- because this will certify his Islamism. The irrational element in the credo is what links him and the ruling ayatollahs to Hitler and Stalin, secular though those two were.

One possible response is to wait and see what happens next, as the Western democracies by and large did in the 1930s. Now as then, fatalism settles in, dictating that Iran will soon go nuclear and nothing can be done about it. The recent British foreign minister, Jack Straw, for instance, gave his hand away when he went on record to say that any use of force would be "inconceivable." To give an impression of activity, fatalist politicians and commentators advocate "engagement," a euphemism for keeping up appearances while doing as little as possible. Time and again Tehran enters a process of talks, only in order to stall and pursue its program regardless. But according to the fatalists, the ayatollahs aren't really irrational or ideological: They will prove responsible once they have in their hands this accretion of power; Mutual Assured Destruction will surely curtail their messianic mission, as it did the Kremlin's.

President Bush's doctrine of preemption offers the obvious alternative that the day is coming when the Iranian nuclear program will have to be taken out by whatever means are available. But the fatalists quickly counter that any use of force will hurt us as much as them. Muslim rage and nationalist backlash will make the clash of civilizations a fact of life. Terrorism will become unstoppable, and who knows what nasty surprises may be in store? The Iranians will close the Strait of Hormuz, and interrupt oil supplies with incalculable consequences.

Caught in the cross-currents of fear and wishful thinking, Tehran, Washington, and London seem to be creating almost ideal conditions for misunderstandings and miscalculations.

The Cold War offers the successful precedent of containment, a compromise between surrender and force, one of those much-vaunted Third Ways. This involves the usual

gamut of measures available for treating rogue states: sanctions, boycotts, exclusion from the World Cup, motions in the Security Council, and whatever else diplomats and lawyers can devise. Given its increasing resentment over the outcome of the Cold War, Russia has broken ranks, selling Iran advanced missile weaponry; and some 2,500 Russian technical experts are at work on the nuclear program. Also unfortunately, the U.N. commission whose purpose is nuclear disarmament has just negated itself by electing an Iranian member. Nevertheless, the majority of Iranian clerics are corrupt, and a substantial part of the population is wholly contemptuous of them and the barbaric society they have put in place. Conceivably, a more unanimous international pressure could intensify internal dissatisfaction to a degree that the regime might not be able to repress, ruthlessly totalitarian though it is. In which case, the regime might dissolve as once the Soviets did.

Facts on the ground, however, are likely soon to be overtaking fatalists and containment-hopefuls alike. For years Iran has been building a position of strength in Lebanon by recruiting, arming, and financing Hezbollah, in effect colonizing the country by stealth. Under the command of Iranian clerics, Hezbollah is at once a militia of about 8,000 gunmen, a political party, and a state within the state. Unlike other Lebanese militias, it refuses to disarm. Its arsenal includes some 10,000 Katyusha rockets capable of doing damage deep into Israel. Unless or until Iran develops the nuclear bomb and the means to deliver it, Hezbollah remains its one immediately effective weapon against Israel. Senior Iranians stir the pot with announcements that, should the United States "make any mischief" in Iran, "the first place we will target will be Israel."

Real mischief is currently building in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. The Islamists of Hamas won the recent election, but the secular nationalists of Fatah are unwilling to concede that they lost it. Nominally the Palestinian president but more essentially leader of Fatah, Mahmoud Abbas is refusing to allow Hamas control of the security forces. The Hamas foreign minister is accusing Abbas of "paralyzing" the government. In this standoff, and in the absence of either law or order, the two sides have begun to shoot it out. "The anarchy in the Gaza Strip will lead to a civil war," the foreign ministers of Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia declared at a meeting in Cairo. They know what they are saying.

And so does the Hezbollah leader, Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah, a black-turbaned cleric who alternates in the usual Iranian Islamist style between anger and self-pity. He chose the same moment to break out of the conspiratorial secrecy in which Hezbollah operates and admit that it is giving "financial, political, and military support" to Palestinian organizations, namely Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

In November last year, Hezbollah launched a heavy attack along the entire Lebanese border with Israel while attempting to abduct Israeli soldiers. Once retired, Israeli generals and intelligence chiefs are free to speak their mind, and a number of such personalities have been warning about the rising danger from Hezbollah. Last year, one former intelligence chief says, as many as 4,000 would-be terrorists were thwarted; and another foresees a "tsunami" of terror this year. At some point, such a level of violence breaks its bounds and becomes a threat to national life.

So long as the Palestinians engage in a power struggle between themselves, Israel can afford to be a bystander and possible beneficiary. But outside interference of any kind is a very different matter. Iran has found a way to make mischief through its satellites and proxies in Iraq, while piously disclaiming responsibility. Through

Hezbollah, it is poised to use the same tactic against Israel.

It is notoriously unwise to make predictions, especially concerning the Middle East in its current instability, but it seems all too probable that Iran will find it irresistible to up the stakes by this trick of using proxies, and in that case dare the Israelis to attack. Iran needs to push Israel to extremes if it is to claim ideological justification for dropping the nuclear bomb someday in the near future in final retaliation.

Israel has to weigh which is the worse choice: either fatalistically to do nothing in the face of ever-mounting provocation, or to accept the challenge and respond to it with enough strength to knock Hezbollah out of the ring in southern Lebanon. An invasion would in effect restore the occupied zone carved out after the 1982 campaign to destroy Fatah, and show that evacuation of the area in 2000 had been a mistake. Walid Jumblatt is one of the wildest of Lebanese politicians, and when he says that Hezbollah should disarm now, and goes on to ask why Lebanon alone should be an arena for Arab-Israeli conflict, he may well be reading the omens correctly.

Israel has never been inclined to participate in its own extinction. The elimination from the equation of Hezbollah and those 10,000 Katyusha rockets would relieve a present danger, and serve to contain Iran by proving the limits of its reach; and it might also extend the strange Phony War through which the world is now living until such time as the Iranians are able to save themselves from their doom-laden regime.

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SYRIA

Can Dissident Filmmakers Effect Change in Syria?

New Yorker

By Lawrence Wright

5/15

"On the one side, it's a tragedy that I have made only two feature films in thirty years," the Syrian director Ossama Mohammed told me last month. "Yet, from the other side, I see it as a miracle." We were sitting in the Rawda Café, the center of the modest intellectual life of Damascus, where television stars, screenwriters, and poets gather for leisurely mid-morning chats. The clatter of backgammon boards and the smell of apple-flavored tobacco from sheesha pipes filled the room. A man in a black jacket at the next table, who appeared to be reading a magazine, occasionally leaned toward our conversation.

"In Syria, we have this huge army of secret police and a complete absence of legal protections," Mohammed said, in a quiet, angry voice. "You can go to jail for thirty-five years and nobody will ask about you." He is fifty-two and broad-chested, with an unruly beard and wiry gray hair streaming down his back; his eyes are the same color as his habitual unsmoked cigar. "People here have a sense of the balance of forces," he said. "They realize they are not strong enough to resist." He cautioned, "In Syria, what we keep inside our imagination-what we don't tell-that is the main

reality."

Nearly every Middle Eastern country is governed by an authoritarian regime, but that hasn't kept many of those countries-notably, Iran and Egypt-from developing surprisingly lively cinematic traditions. In a quarrelsome, voluble region, Syria is a strangely muted place. I wondered if, by examining Syrian movies and talking to Syrian filmmakers, I could glimpse this closely guarded inner world.

Mohammed's films, "Stars in Broad Daylight" (1988) and "Sacrifices" (2002), are merciless indictments of the Baathist dictatorship that has controlled Syria since 1963, when it came to power in a military coup. Both movies have received international acclaim; they were presented at the Cannes Film Festival, and "Stars" won first prize at the Festival of Valencia and at the International Festival of Rabat. This month, they will be shown in America, as part of a retrospective of Syrian cinema, at Lincoln Center. "Stars" explores the toxic effect of totalitarianism on ordinary Syrians, as seen through the internal battles of a dysfunctional family. The oldest of three children works for the phone company, where he casually listens in on telephone calls. Corrupt and brutally insouciant, he forces his siblings to become engaged to people they despise, in order to expand his land holdings. He encourages his brother to savagely beat their sister's suitor, then makes his sister get involved with a member of the regime, who rapes her. Not coincidentally, the actor playing this monstrous character looks like Hafez al-Assad-the man who ruled Syria for nearly thirty years, until his death, in 2000. Funny, violent, and blunt, "Stars" is perhaps the greatest film to come out of Syria. It should have been the debut of a director of international stature. Both "Stars" and "Sacrifices" required years of negotiation with government censors, and, in both cases, after Mohammed completed the film, his final cut was rejected, meaning that the film was effectively banned at home.

Although many foreign critics have portrayed Mohammed and other Syrian directors as symbols of artistic victimization, he defiantly rejects that role. "Do you want me to play the hero?" he asked. "Do you want me to repeat two hundred times each day that my films are forbidden? This is my society. I belong to this world. I am not a victim."

Yet a look around the Rawda Café suggests that the creative class in Syria has a lot of time on its hands. One writer I met has a job counting the city's street lamps. Most of the country's filmmakers, including Mohammed, are employees of the National Film Organization, which manages the production of all Syrian films. Mohammed is paid two hundred and fifty dollars a month, which is the average government wage. This salary allows filmmakers to pay their rent and spend much of their day idling at the Rawda, which has the atmosphere of a perpetual, brooding salon. For the past few years, Mohammed told me, he has been adapting "Manifest Illusions," a deeply psychological memoir by Raja al-Taey, a Syrian feminist; but he recently set the project aside. The National Film Organization has a small budget, and produces only one or two movies a year, so there's no rush.

The Syrian government and the filmmakers have developed an odd, uncomfortable dependency upon each other. Ibrahim Hamidi, the Damascus bureau chief for the pan-Arab newspaper Al Hayat, which is published in London, says, "By permitting Ossama Mohammed and others to make movies financed by the government, the regime is harming the filmmakers' credibility, and also trying to contain them. The films get awards abroad, which is good P.R. for the regime. At the same time,

Syrians aren't allowed to see the movies." While filmmakers have the opportunity to test the limits of government censorship, the regime acquires an intimate sense of the mood of the nation's intellectuals. "The people who rule Syria are not stupid," Hamidi said. "They play a very sophisticated game."

Nevertheless, the interchange between the filmmakers and the Assad regime may be the most significant political dialogue in the country today. "I have an obsession with facing authority," Mohammed said. "This society is responsible for creating the dictatorship-it's in our culture, our way of believing and thinking. I am trying to expose the authority inside us and the shadow of political authority in front of our doors."

The Rawda Café is in a neighborhood of dowdy, utilitarian apartments that were built during the nineteen-seventies and eighties, when the stripped-down, socialist model became the architectural aesthetic in many Arab countries. Damascus climbs up Mt. Qassioun, a treeless khaki-colored ridge that overlooks the city. Unlike in most cities with mountain vistas, the higher the neighborhood the poorer the inhabitants. In the evenings, the peasants on the high slope may smoke a sheesha in a patch of meadow and look down on the city lights.

A few blocks away from the café is the Syrian Parliament Building, with its requisite portraits of Hafez al-Assad and his son Bashar, who has run the country since his father's death. Forty years of Baathist rule has resulted in a near-total elimination of political opposition. In 1980, Hafez began a series of mass arrests, in an attempt to eliminate dissidents. Two years later, he ordered the destruction of Hama, a northern city that was a stronghold of the Muslim Brotherhood, the insurrectionary Islamist group. As many as twenty-five thousand people were killed, and the city was bulldozed, as a warning to those who might defy his authority. Even now, anyone suspected of belonging to the Brotherhood can be executed without trial.

The Parliament Building is across the street from the Cham Palace, the only movie theatre in the capital that shows current releases. For the past several weeks, "Big Momma's House 2," the Martin Lawrence comedy, has been running. When I went, on a Thursday evening, there was a small audience of families with children. Damascus was once home to dozens of first-run theatres, but, because moviegoing draws people together in a communal experience, the Baathist regime considers it a dangerous habit. Starting in the nineteen-eighties, Party thugs began disrupting film audiences; at the same time, the selection of movies officially offered became smaller and smaller, and the theatres, which were forbidden to raise ticket prices, deteriorated. "Two decades ago, there were a hundred and twenty cinemas in Syria," one filmmaker told me. "Now there are only six that are functioning." As the country's cinemas fell into ruin, Syrians increasingly stayed indoors.

Ossama Mohammed fondly recalls the time when Syrians went to the movies regularly. One of nine children, he grew up in Latakia, a town on the Mediterranean coast. "Before 1963, people could see films the same year they were produced," he said. When "Spartacus," the 1960 Kubrick classic, came to town, he said, "I didn't have money to go to the cinema, so I would steal from my brother Ali and invite my friends. Ali discovered this, and he brought a big stick and said, 'For every franc you steal, I will beat you once.' I thought about it, and the next day I stole three francs. It was worth it!"

Mohammed's father was a teacher at an elementary school where corporal

punishment was commonplace. "But I am proud that my father didn't do that once," he said. "At school, I was punished hundreds of times. Once, I warned a teacher who was going to beat me. I was used to fighting on the streets. I said, 'If you strike me, I will hit you back.' He didn't believe me. So I beat him up. I was sixteen."

Thrown out of Latakia's schools, Mohammed moved to Damascus to finish high school. The following year, one of his sisters, a doctor, called with some good news. She had saved the life of a government official who was in charge of giving foreign-study scholarships to Syrian students. "Do you want to study in Russia?" she asked Mohammed.

"Study what?"

"Medicine," she proposed.

"No."

"Engineering?"

"No."

"Film?"

Mohammed remembered "Spartacus," and agreed. In 1974, he enrolled at the renowned Russian State Institute of Cinematography, or V.G.I.K., which had produced many masters of cinema, including Andrei Tarkovsky and Vasily Shukshin. In Moscow, Mohammed met another Syrian, Mohammed Malas, who was in his final year at V.G.I.K., and Malas introduced him to his mentor, Igor Talankin, who accepted Mohammed as a protégé.

A third Syrian, Abdullatif Abdulhamid, arrived in Moscow in 1975. He was the son of a military officer in the Golan Heights. Once a month, a film—usually Egyptian or Lebanese—was shown in the main square of the little town where he lived. The screen was propped up on a car beside the square, and the dialogue could barely be heard over the roar of a generator. Despite the primitive conditions, Abdulhamid became captivated by the world of cinema. "For a month, I used to imitate all the sounds of the movie, until the next one appeared," he told me.

Upon returning home from Russia, the three Syrians attempted to create an indigenous cinema. In 1974, Malas, along with Omar Amiralay, another young filmmaker, founded the Damascus Cinema Club. Amiralay, who became an accomplished documentarian, had already angered the regime by depicting the despair of rural peasants in "Everyday Life in a Syrian Village," a documentary, released that year, that sharply undercut the government's boasts about agrarian reform. The film was banned. Three years later, Amiralay made "The Chickens," a critical look at the government's clumsy efforts to stimulate private industry. He focussed on a village where the peasants put everything they owned into the poultry business, even turning their houses into chicken coops. A plague among the chickens forced the villagers into bankruptcy, but they continued to pursue their ill-advised investment. At the end of the film, the clucking of chickens drowns out the speech of the village's doomed capitalists.

Amiralay said of the cinema club, "We showed the kind of films we dreamed of

making." Using projectors borrowed from the Soviet cultural center, the club members set up a screening room in the ground floor of an apartment building. The room, which faced a garden, was too cramped for the film to be projected in front of the screen. So they turned to Nazih Shahbandar, an elderly man who had pioneered movie projection in Syria by making all the equipment himself. Shahbandar set up the projector in an adjoining kitchen and projected the image onto a mirror in the garden, which reflected it onto the rear of the screen. In that manner, the cinema club presented the works of Bergman, Fellini, and Godard. It showed few Syrian films. "Third World film in general is very poor, with the notable exception of India in the fifties and sixties, especially the movies of Satyajit Ray," Amiralay said. "He made from the tragedy of his country a noble artistic cinema."

The screenings were followed by impassioned debates, which provided a safe way to discuss the filmmakers' larger predicament. Club members held screenwriting seminars and technical workshops, and published a magazine, *Film*. The French comic actor and director Jacques Tati visited the club, and the Italian writer and director Pier Paolo Pasolini came to speak when he was shooting "Medea" in Aleppo. In 1978, in conjunction with the French journal *Cahiers du Cinéma*, the club sponsored two weeks of "cinema and politics." There were two screenings a day in a seven-hundred-seat theatre rented for the occasion. "We sold out every performance," Amiralay recalled. The critics of *Cahiers du Cinéma* had chosen eighteen films, but the Syrian government banned more than half of them. Instead, the French critic Serge Daney sat on the stage and narrated detailed descriptions of them. "It was a screening without an image-an absolutely beautiful happening," Amiralay said.

The Assad government's huge crackdown began two years later. Hundreds of dissidents were imprisoned and tortured. Amiralay discovered that his name was on a list of people to be arrested, and he moved to France. Most of the filmmakers who worked for the government, however, stayed and tried to practice their craft in a society that was cowed and broken.

Fares Helou is one of Syria's biggest movie and television stars. He is a burly man with tightly curled hair and a heavy, expressive face. Helou, who is forty-five, is also known for declaring his negative views of the regime, and he has continued to do so even in the face of a new wave of arrests which began last fall. "I'm loved as an actor, so I'm protected," he said one afternoon at the Rawda Café. Indeed, as we talked, fans approached him for autographs and snapshots. But his friends worry that Helou's career has been damaged by his political stance. "His star-o-meter is going down," one of them told me. "People are afraid to work with him. Maybe he's not as protected as he thinks he is."

Helou fell in love with cinema while studying at Syria's Higher Institute of Theatre; soon after graduating, he got a role in Mohammed Malas's second feature film, "The Night" (1993). Subsequent television roles have made him known throughout the Arab world. (Syrian miniseries are ubiquitous on Arab satellite television.) I asked him if things had changed in Syria since the ascent to power of Bashar al-Assad, who has presented himself to the West as a reformer. "We had the same amount of freedom, or more, in Hafez's time," Helou said. "Hafez, at least, was clear-with any position, you knew exactly the space that was allowed. But after the son came in the freedom given us was not real; it was a trap. When voices started to be heard presenting new and modern ideas, the regime arrested those voices." On March 8th, the annual celebration of the Baath military coup, about a hundred and fifty

demonstrators gathered peacefully in front of the Ministry of Justice. Hundreds of Baathist college students, members of a paramilitary brigade, attacked the demonstration, beating the protesters indiscriminately. While the police stood aside and watched, a well-known female novelist, Samar Yazbek, was bludgeoned.

As Helou and I were talking, a young fan in a jean jacket and a checked shirt approached the table. "I love you," he said to Helou, in Arabic. "I just want to exchange mobile numbers. I promise I won't abuse it."

To my surprise, Helou offered his number. "What's your name?" he asked the fan.

"My friends call me Stalin," he said. "Because I'm a killer." Stalin had broad shoulders, a long, unbroken eyebrow that stretched across his forehead, and a gold chain around his neck.

Helou gave a dismissive nod.

I asked him about Ossama Mohammed's second film, "Sacrifices." Helou plays a father who leaves Syria to fight in the 1973 war against Israel. When he returns home to his family, on a remote mountaintop, he is caked with mud. In a savagely ironic scene, he gathers the family to tell his story. The women are beating cotton bolls on the table, and a cow stands at the front door. Helou's character explains that he was nearly killed when he was buried by an explosion for three days. It took that long for his fellow-Arabs to get a bulldozer to dig him out. "There was no fuel left, it seems," the character says bitterly. Where was the Arabs' oil when it was needed? he wonders. He then pulls the male children aside and forces them to drink oil-ostensibly to toughen them up.

Helou said of his character, "The shock of being defeated makes him cruel. Embracing the illusion of authority makes him think he was victorious." But, as the film shows, the only legacy of violence is more violence. Helou's character eventually abuses power in the same way as the corrupt and incompetent state that sent him into the disastrous war.

Stalin suddenly returned to our table. "I have another phone," he said, pulling it out of a black leather bag strapped around his waist. "I want to give you the number. Very few people have this. I even take it with me on operations." He was making it clear that he was with the secret police.

"Is this the first time you've been here?" Helou asked him.

"No, I'm always here," Stalin said. "We have spoken before. Usually, I'm dressed in a military uniform, so perhaps you don't recognize me."

Stalin asked if Helou was a member of the Baath Party. Helou said he was not.

"You cannot not be a member," Stalin said angrily, grabbing Helou's hand. "This is a real Baathist handshake! I will pay your dues for you!"

Stalin noticed that I was taking notes on his conversation, and he denounced American and British aggression in Iraq, and the interference of human-rights activists in Syrian affairs. "We should be able to discipline the peasants without outside interference," he said. "I quote Aristotle to his student, Alexander the Great,

who said that you should treat the Greek people as gentlemen and the people of the East as slaves."

Stalin left, and I asked Helou about the baffling mixture of fan worship, academic pretense, and veiled threats. "He came to deliver a message," Helou said. "He's telling me to take it easy-to calm down." His left leg was jiggling furiously.

Minutes later, Stalin returned again, this time carrying a cup of coffee and a pack of Gitanes. He obviously intended to disrupt the interview. Bizarrely, he pulled yet another telephone from a jacket pocket. "This is my most private number," he said to Helou. He pointed to an arrow on the phone's screen, beside Helou's mobile number. "This arrow goes through you," he said, laughing. He squeezed in next to Helou, who had become quiet.

"Do you work for the government?" I asked Stalin.

"Of course-that's why I'm talking to you," he said, switching to English. He added that he was also a journalist for a pro-government magazine and that he loved movies-"Syrian movies," he said. "I love the movies that are produced by the National Film Organization and the movies made by this man, regardless of the fact that he is not obedient."

Stalin took Helou's hand once more. "I feel the need to beat someone," he said, laughing into Helou's shoulder. "May I beat you?"

I could see that Helou was ready to get out of there. "Welcome to Syria," Stalin said as we left.

"Syria is a dictatorship, but it would be a mistake to understand us as a totalitarian society," Omar Amiralay, the documentarian, explained. "For instance, the National Film Organization has made forty-five features, but there is not one propaganda film in the modest history of Syrian cinema." It's true that Syrian films tend to be critical of the regime, but the nature of the protest is often indirect, like the projection system of the Damascus Cinema Club. I thought about Mohammed Malas's mournful "Dreams of the City" (1983), in which a young boy whose father has just died searches for a role model in his Damascus neighborhood but finds only corruption; and Abdullatif Abdulhamid's "Nights of the Jackals" (1989), an angry account of the death of traditional rural life. These films show a society that is, in Amiralay's words, "completely ruined."

The most brazenly subversive film that the National Film Organization has produced is "Stars in Broad Daylight," Mohammed's 1988 dark comedy about the family autocrat. I asked Mohammed how the movie came to be made. "Dictatorship is not like this monolith where everyone is the same," he explained. "No. Inside, you find a lot of people want to support you. 'Stars' wouldn't exist without three or four Syrian cinematographers who read the script on behalf of the National Film Organization." At the time, the government wanted to film an innocuous script by a different director, but the cinematographers had repeatedly rejected it. Finally, they made a deal, Mohammed recalled. "They said, 'We will give you this film if you give us 'Stars.' "

While Mohammed was working on the script, his brother Ali, an electrical engineer, was imprisoned, after government officials tricked him by inviting him and several

university professors to share their views on reform. According to Mohammed, the authorities threatened to send Ali from a prison in Damascus to one in Palmyra, which has a reputation as a torture chamber, if Mohammed did not tone down his script. Mohammed refused to make any changes. "My relationship with my brother is like this: To salute him, I will make my movie. That is how I support him!" Ali was released after four and a half years, just before Mohammed began shooting.

During the filming, crew members began to get scared. "The game was to make love with the fear," Mohammed said. "It was 'Yes, let's put Hafez al-Assad inside my movie.' " He cast his Moscow schoolmate Abdullatif Abdulhamid in the lead role, largely because of his unmistakable resemblance to Assad. In a satirical sequence that pointedly conjures both the secret police and Marlon Brando in "The Wild One," the Assad figure and his brothers, wearing aviator sunglasses, ride through town on motorcycles. The vicious protagonist also reminded me of Stalin, the man in the café. Before I went to Damascus, the relationships of the characters in Syrian films had seemed to me full of unmotivated cruelty, but now they were beginning to make sense.

I asked Mohammed how he got away with making such a defiant film. "When you live in a garden of corruption, you learn the skills of bluffing," he said. "Some of my colleagues came and said, 'If this is not a piece of great art, you are going to be fucked.' When I was shooting, I forgot about this, but one day, when I was stuck in traffic, I thought, My God! What am I doing?" He thought that he might be jailed when he submitted the final cut. To his surprise, he was not. But his movie was put in cold storage.

It took Mohammed fourteen years to make his second project, "Sacrifices," which portrays the breakdown of social relations under dictatorship. "It is the story of Syria," he told me. "A huge quantity of time has been lost by holding on to illusions—the illusions of heroism, religion, Arab nationalism—and by not dealing with the Other. The Other is not Israel. It is inside our homes. It is inside everybody." He decided to make a movie that was more introspective and metaphorical than "Stars in Broad Daylight" but just as daring. One boy in the movie, he told me, represents his loving side; another represents his tyrannical side. "It's easy to insult the dictator," he told me. "It's much more difficult to find the dictator inside yourself."

When the script was completed, Mohammed submitted it to the National Film Organization. The scenario, about a dying man with a large family whose members are all competing for his blessing, was lyrical but obscure, and laden with references that government officials found both mysterious and dangerous. What, they demanded, was the meaning of the child who places birds inside bottles? Or the baby who floats, like Moses, down a Syrian river in his bassinet?

The film ends with a shot of a giant tree, just after the boy who represents Mohammed's loving self crawls into a casket. "The tree is positive, right?" a member of the National Film Organization asked him. "It's the homeland, right?"

"No," Mohammed said. "The tree is the tree."

He certainly didn't make it easy for himself. "You want to know my opinion about Syrian politics?" Mohammed recalls saying. "Is it democracy? Absolutely not. Is it dictatorship? Yes. But if you want this country to have a democracy after a hundred years, then this is our work together right now. So don't shit on my film."

One scene, in particular, troubled the director of the National Film Organization. Three boys are taught how to slaughter a cow while reciting verses from the Koran. "All the West is attacking us because, for them, we are killers and extremists," the director told Mohammed. "You don't want to say that." He asked Mohammed to cut the scene.

Mohammed refused, claiming that violence was an essential part of the culture. "You can't be a man unless you learn to kill," he declared. The scene represents the initiation of a new generation into the pathologies of Syrian life.

The men were at an impasse. Mohammed finally said, "I know a secret about you. When you were young, you jumped from one building to another to meet your girlfriend."

According to Mohammed, the bureaucrat was astonished. "How do you know this?" he asked.

"Ask the man who jumped what he thinks. Does he like the script?"

"It's amazingly beautiful."

"Please, follow yourself. Don't forget who you are."

"Go!" the director of the National Film Organization said. "Do it!"

Four years later, when "Sacrifices" was finally completed, a government committee, which included Baath Party officials, demanded considerable cuts. Mohammed declined, even though he knew that the film would therefore not be shown in Syria.

Mohammed's brother Ali happened to wander into the Rawda Café while we were talking. I recognized him—a white-haired man with kind green eyes—because he appears in "Sacrifices." In a startling scene, a pubescent boy is tied to a post after violating the fast during Ramadan. A Koran is tied into the knot of the rope. Ali enters and unties the rope. The image is deeply personal: Mohammed had told me that Ali was the first in his family to deny the authority of religion.

"When I did that scene, Ossama took me aside and asked me to push my anger," Ali said. "So I told him a story. When I was in prison, someone came to take a thirteen-year-old boy to Palmyra prison. He was terrified. He held on to me and pleaded not to let them take him away. This shot is for that boy."

"Sacrifices" received enthusiastic reviews at its première, at the 2002 Cannes Film Festival, although some viewers were put off by Mohammed's elliptical storytelling. Indeed, when I first saw "Sacrifices," the references seemed so personal that I wondered if this is what happens when a director no longer expects to have an audience—he makes a film that is entirely for himself. Even Syrian intellectuals who have obtained the film on the underground DVD circuit were puzzled by some of the scenes, like the opening shot, which shows a naked boy being lowered into a cave to fetch a chicken, or the sequence in which a boy's pants burst into flames.

Mohammed does not see the hermetic qualities of "Sacrifices" as a weakness. "The kitchen of cinema here is full of poisonous materials," he told me. "But we are lucky

as filmmakers to work in this kitchen. Because there is no audience, at least we don't have to worry about the censorship imposed by commercialism." He paused, then said, "Even if there were an audience, I would not change my ways."

In 1992, Omar Amiralay, after making eight films in France, came back to Syria. "I was fed up with Paris," he said, and he sensed that he could go home without being arrested. Also, he had fallen in love with a Damascene woman. "It was a sentimental return," he said.

But Amiralay had a score to settle, too. As a young documentarian, he had been given the chance to make a movie about the damming of the Euphrates River. The result, "Film-Essay on the Euphrates Dam" (1970), was heavily influenced by Soviet documentaries, with a reverent approach to the mighty instruments of labor. He now sees it as a naively Marxist work—"a hymn to the crane" is how he refers to it now—that is shamefully uncritical of the Baathist regime. In 2003, he returned to the dam region. "I wanted to make a film of fifteen shots, which are the fifteen reasons I hate the Baath Party. The last reason was that I hate myself, for having been obliged to make a film for them. They spoiled forty years of my life."

While doing research for the new documentary, "A Flood in Baath Country," Amiralay came to believe that the real reason the regime constructed the dam creating Lake Assad, as the massive reservoir is called, was not to generate hydroelectric power but to protect itself against the remote possibility that Turkey, Syria's northern neighbor, might choke off Syria's water supply in a hostile political gesture. As a consequence, Amiralay said, thousands of farmers were displaced, and archeologically important villages were drowned. "The thing that angered me the most is that I learned that this was the place where human beings became farmers for the first time, and left the hunting-and-gathering stage, eleven thousand years before Christ."

"Flood" begins with a bitter voice-over. Amiralay says, "In 1970, I was a firm advocate of the modernization of my homeland, Syria, so much so that I dedicated my first film to the building of a dam in the Euphrates River, the pride and joy of the Baath Party then in power. Today, I regret this error of my youth."

"For me, that first film is a deep wound in my heart," Amiralay told me. "I was able to make a career outside of my homeland. I don't regret it, but if they had given me the chance to live in Syria maybe I and my colleagues could have created a better country." The rueful "Flood" is a skillful and mature attack on a regime that has destroyed the people as willfully as it ruined the land.

I asked if "Flood" had ever been shown in Syria. Amiralay shook his head. "But when I finished I decided to give it to some film pirates," he explained. "Two months later, everybody in Damascus had seen it. It was a digital flood."

In April, 2000, the filmmaker Nabil Maleh started the Committee for the Revival of Civil Society, along with a small group of lawyers and intellectuals. Decades earlier, Maleh had directed some of Syria's most insurrectionary movies, including "The Leopard" (1972), a historical film about a revolt against an earlier Syrian regime. Maleh, who is seventy, is old enough to recall Syria in the nineteen-fifties, when it had a vigorous press and numerous political parties, as well as a vibrant civic life.

Once the movement got going, allied committees began springing up all over Syria.

Hafez al-Assad died that June, which increased expectations that Syria might finally open up. In September, ninety-nine prominent Syrians, including fifteen filmmakers, signed a petition calling for an end to the restrictions on freedom of assembly, opinion, and the press; a general amnesty for all political prisoners; and a decree allowing political exiles abroad to return. The regime responded by releasing six hundred political prisoners.

In January, 2001, more than a thousand prominent Syrians, some of them living in exile, signed a broader and more daring petition, called the Basic Document, which had been drafted by Maleh's committee. The Basic Document called for an end to Baath Party domination. "Immediately came the crash," Maleh recalled. Bashar al-Assad warned that the advocates of greater openness were outsiders and were undermining the stability of the country. He declared that all social, political, and cultural gatherings had to be approved in advance. A few months later, ten signatories of the Basic Document were imprisoned for "attempting to change the constitution by illegal means." (Some of them remain in prison, in solitary confinement.) Officials told Maleh that he would never be able to make films again. The government effectively smothered the reform movement, even as it maintained the appearance of liberalizing by releasing elderly political prisoners and allowing the publication of new journals with minimal political content. "The development of civil-society institutions must come at a later stage," Bashar said in an interview with the pan-Arabic newspaper *Al Sharq al-Awsat*.

"We lost the war without ever fighting it," Maleh admitted one evening at dinner in an old house in the Christian quarter of Damascus, now a lovely but generally empty restaurant. I had suggested that political opposition in Damascus often seemed more gestural than real, and that making movies no one could see was therefore a characteristic expression of Syrian dissent. Perhaps the society was so tamed by the regime that no more could be expected of it; but it was also possible that the regime was in part the political expression of a brutal and authoritarian culture.

Maleh had told me about an incident in his childhood, when he was seven years old. "I was with my family in a public park in Damascus," he recalled. "I wanted to use the swing. There were some children already playing there, and they were guarded by a soldier, probably a driver for some big shot. I don't know what I did to provoke it, but the soldier slapped me, knocking me four metres away. I picked up a clod of dirt, threw it at the soldier, and ran away. From that moment, all my life has been connected with a hatred of the uniform and of authority."

This anger was palpable in Maleh's films, most poignantly in "The Extras" (1993), in which two lovers meet at a friend's apartment for an assignation. They suppose that they have finally shut out the world that has prevented them from consummating their relationship, but fear prevents them from enjoying their moment alone. The film gets its title from the male character, who plays bit parts in theatrical productions, underscoring Maleh's belief that "we are all extras in this society." The real world intrudes when the secret police enter the apartment, supposedly concerned about a blind musician who lives next door. The man tries to prevent the musician's arrest and, in a reverie, imagines dispatching the police with a few judo moves, but his fantasy is broken by a hard slap that knocks him to the floor. He is humiliated and powerless in front of his lover—a devastating turning point in their relationship. "They enter the apartment as lovers," Maleh told me. "They leave as strangers."

Maleh confided to me that he had once been beaten by the police, after a public protest. "I was taken to prison for a day or two and slapped around," he said. "It was part of the fun of the times."

I thought of other scenes in Syrian cinema in which physical abuse plays a significant role—for example, in "Stars," a character is made permanently deaf by a blow from his father. These scenes, I knew, reflected the filmmakers' experiences. When I asked them about the abuse, however, their responses surprised me. Abdulhamid, whose films often feature punitive fathers, told me about going to see "Hercules" when he was a boy. Afterward, he ran into his family's wheat field with a stick, engaging in mock battle. When he damaged a few stalks, he said, with a smile, "my father beat me." Amiralay, whose father died when he was five, said, "I was beaten only by the slippers of my mother, and for this I am grateful. Such beatings awakened me."

I went to dinner one night in a restaurant with some Syrian artists, and I brought up the subject of physical abuse. "It's common," the middle-aged woman across from me acknowledged. "But this happens everywhere." She added, "For me, it was a positive experience."

"What do you mean?"

"I was twenty-six years old," she recalled. "At first, I was hurt. I was living just to please others—for example, my ex-husband and his family. Then I realized that a word from your mouth can make the difference between survival and destruction." She was staring at me; her shining brown eyes seemed strangely untroubled.

"A beating did this for you?"

She nodded. "It was like a revolution. It was like you are not living anymore to please others. You suddenly become very brave. I was one step from death, but I was thinking of my children, and I was determined to survive. It was positive for me. This is when I decided to be a creative person."

"So your ex-husband hit you?"

"No," she said quietly, so the other guests wouldn't hear. She took my notepad and wrote, "Raped by the government."

Later, I asked Maleh if Syrian society had always been so abusive. "No," he said. "Violence became a part of the daily practice in the last forty years." The Baathist throttling of democratic expression, he believed, replicated itself in the relationships between authority figures and people without power—women, children, and the poor.

Damascenes like to think of themselves as a pragmatic race of merchants who have survived millennia of repressive governments. They believe that they are superior to their Iraqi neighbors, whom they see as defiant and bloody-minded. "When the Americans destroyed Baghdad, in 2003, it was the twenty-fourth time in history this has happened," Ibrahim Hamidi, the Al Hayat bureau chief, told me. "Since the beginning of civilization, Damascus has never been destroyed." Amiralay recalled that an archeologist friend once sent him an e-mail with an image of a sheared-off cliff face, the strata of geological time clearly exposed. "You see this line?" the archeologist said, indicating a dark ribbon about ten centimetres in width. "It is eight

thousand years of history." The whole history of Syria, Amiralay said, had been exposed to view. "I think the Baath period will be only a fraction of a millimetre on that scale," he said.

I asked him if, in that long history, there was ever a moment when the people of Syria had lived free and happy lives.

"I don't care," Amiralay said, testily. "It's a beautiful image."

Although the filmmakers often talked about freedom, they revealed a perverse desire to romanticize the artistic constraints of dictatorship. "The most beautiful Soviet films were produced in the era of Stalin," Abdulhamid told me. "When the Soviet Union collapsed and suddenly you could say whatever you wanted, the Russians began producing the most trivial films. Nobody should be forbidden to say what he wants, but it is a phenomenon that dazzles me: when you're suppressed, you think better."

The example that haunts Abdulhamid and many other Syrian filmmakers is Iran, where artists such as Abbas Kiarostami work under even more restraints than the Syrians. "They have to work within this box, but they show their films all over the world," he marvelled. Hatem Ali, a prominent television director, has studied Iranian films closely. "The fact that they have succeeded tells us a lot," he says. He gave the example of a scene in a film by Mohsen Makhmalbaf, depicting an old woman who lives with her son. "She is in a wheelchair, and her hair is gray and unkempt," he said. "All the windows are covered, and somehow this film is talking about the isolation of Iran. The surprise comes when you learn that this actress is not a woman-it's a man. My makeup artist showed me all the photographs of how it was accomplished. In Iran, it is not acceptable for an actress to show her hair, but it would not be realistic for this elderly woman to appear in her house in hijab. So the director used a man." The lesson he drew from this was: "It is the art that is important, not the censorship."

"The Arab cinema has few masterpieces-no more than ten," Omar Amiralay pronounced one afternoon over cappuccino. Among them he included two Egyptian films, "Cairo Central Station," by Youssef Chahine, and "Fools' Alley," by Tewfik Saleh. Both films, he observed, were the directors' first major efforts. "It is a syndrome in Arab cinema that directors who make a remarkable first film rarely succeed in making another," he said. There were no Syrian films in his pantheon.

I asked where he placed his friend Ossama Mohammed. "Ossama is an exception," Amiralay said. "But he hasn't had the liberty to make an accomplished film, and, of course, he suffers from a lack of opportunity and experience." Syrian films have the potential to be great films, he continued, "but they lack the dimension of unity-the compact structure, the purposeful style, the visual sensibility. Many of the actors are not sufficiently mature or experienced. I always feel there is something wrong, as if they were ordinary people who were simulating acting. And, finally, the narration. We are so obsessed by daily reality that scriptwriters don't have the courage to invent new realities from their own imaginations. Because of this, I think they are making bad documentaries and passing them off as fiction."

Amiralay hopes to establish a school of cinema in the Middle East. He is working in conjunction with a European film institute. "It will be an academy that will have a three-year program with different specializations-photography, editing, directing, scriptwriting," he said. He said that his dream is to bring the institute to Damascus, if

political circumstances permit. "We have until 2008 to decide about our location," he said. It was one of the first notes of optimism I had heard since arriving in Syria.

One evening, I went to the Old City with a Syrian cameraman, Samer al-Zayat, for a drink at Café Mar Mar, in a sixteenth-century building with stone walls and twenty-foot ceilings. We walked into a roomful of upturned faces illuminated by the familiar flickering light of a movie. I had stumbled upon the latest incarnation of the Damascus Cinema Club. I ordered popcorn and a Martini (it's a very congenial club) and watched "Big Fish." In attendance were many of Syria's film and television stars, who apparently have enough influence to keep the underground operation alive. "This is the only venue left for new artistic movies," Zayat told me. "They advertise by S.M.S. messages on the telephones, and show films every Monday night. Last week, we watched 'Munich.' " Unlike the old days of the cinema club, however, the audience departed quietly when the film was over.

The week after I left Syria, a government-approved newspaper announced that, the following day, Ossama Mohammed's "Sacrifices" would be given its first public showing, in Homs, a provincial town in central Syria. The suddenness of the announcement seemed to be connected to the government's awareness of this article. Mohammed raced to Homs, only to discover that his film was not being shown after all; instead, a Baathist youth rally was under way. Though he knew that he wouldn't change the situation, he acted out the role of the fearless dissident. "I shouted and made a scene," Mohammed told me. "I said I would call the governor. I really played the game."

Assad State of Affairs

Weekly Standard

By David Schenker

6/12

WHEN HAFEZ AL-ASSAD was president-for-life of Syria, Washington overlooked the misdeeds of his Baathist dictatorship because it always seemed the brass ring of a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace deal was just around the corner. Now that Assad is dead and his son Bashar nears the six-year mark of his own rule, Washington is again in effect tolerating the Baathist dictatorship. This time, the explanation is that not peace, but war is just around the corner--in Iraq. With so much on the administration's Middle East agenda, Syria seems poised once more to escape penalty from Washington.

If mere condemnations could kill, Syria would long since be in the morgue. Last week, the State Department spokesman denounced Syria for its heavy-handed treatment of political reformers. In mid-May, U.N. ambassador John Bolton criticized Syria for refusing to recognize the independence of Lebanon. Before that, the administration censured Damascus for its sponsorship of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, which had orchestrated yet another bloody attack in Israel.

The most frequent U.S. complaint these days concerns Syrian mischief in Iraq. Even before the U.S. invasion began in March 2003, the administration was condemning Damascus for shipping military materiel to Saddam. Recent complaints have centered on the transit of jihadists through Syria to Iraq, and on Syria's provision of safe haven to insurgent leaders. In 2005, Washington went a step further, accusing

Damascus of maintaining training camps for Iraqi insurgents, an affront so egregious that the American ambassador to Iraq, Zalmay Khalilzad, warned publicly that "U.S. patience with Syria [was] running out."

But criticism rolls off Assad's back, and it has not been accompanied by measures compelling Syria to change its behavior. Whether Washington has been unwilling or unable to extract a real price from Syria, the effect is the same: Damascus believes it has dodged the bullet. The regime of Bashar Assad appears more confident than at any time since 2003.

To be sure, the administration has tried to ratchet up pressure. But its policy has suffered from inconsistency, even ambivalence. The Syria Accountability Act, requiring the president to choose from an array of sanctions, provides a good illustration. In 2002, the administration balked at signing this legislation, fearing that sanctions would prompt Damascus to stop cooperating with Washington on al Qaeda. But in 2003, the president did sign it into law--and the very same week, a new ambassador was dispatched to Damascus after a hiatus of four months. The timing no doubt sent a mixed message to the Syrians, taking the sting out of the law.

U.S. ambivalence has also been evident in the willingness to dialogue with President Assad even as Syria was contributing to rising American casualties in Iraq. The administration inexplicably spent three years trying to convince Assad that Syrian interests would be served by more moderate policies. Between 2003 and 2005 the Departments of State, Defense, Treasury, and the National Security Council dispatched five senior delegations to Damascus to cajole, and later warn, President Assad that there would be consequences for continued Syrian meddling in Iraq and support for terrorism. These discussions only succeeded in alleviating pressure on the regime by delaying the imposition of tougher measures. Adding insult to injury, these trips, though the emissaries delivered blunt messages, were publicly spun by Syrian officials as "breakthroughs" in Syrian-U.S. relations.

The Bush administration's only real policy successes on Syria have come at the United Nations. Since 2004, the administration has orchestrated a series of Security Council resolutions that have proved devastating to Syrian interests. First and foremost, Resolution 1559 called for an end to the decades-long Syrian presence in Lebanon and the disarming of Hezbollah, while Resolutions 1595 and 1636 established a U.N.-led investigation into the 2005 assassination of former Lebanese prime minister Rafik Hariri and demanded cooperation from Syria, almost certainly a central player in the killing.

After Hariri's murder, it seemed that all the stars were aligned to lower the boom on Damascus. Not only were the appropriate U.N. resolutions in place, but the assassination spurred a rapprochement between the United States and France in opposition to Syria. Alas, to date the administration has been unable to capitalize on this multilateral moment. The final U.N. report on the Hariri murder is due this month, but absent any smoking gun Assad and company may again emerge unscathed.

In practice, since 2005, the administration's moves against Syria have been largely unilateral: terrorist designations of Syrian officials, for example, and provision of financial support to Syrian reformers. The administration did implement Patriot Act Section 311 sanctions against the Commercial Bank of Syria, requiring U.S. banks to cease dealings with the Syrian bank. While these are arguably the most severe

sanctions ever leveled against the Syrians, most unilateral actions have had only a marginal effect.

Indeed, in the three years since the administration chose to ratchet up pressure, Syrian behavior on key issues has seen only incremental change.

On Iraq, Syria reinforced its border and modified visa-entry procedures, making jihadi transit a little more difficult. Yet, according to administration officials, insurgent leaders continue to reside in Syrian safe havens orchestrating operations in Iraq.

On Lebanon, despite the withdrawal of Syrian troops, Damascus remains a significant player and is suspected of involvement in several post-Hariri political murders. Syria continues to support Palestinian terrorist organizations, and arms shipments from Tehran to Hezbollah via Damascus transit Syria unmolested.

After years of threats and condemnations, what has Washington really accomplished with regard to Damascus? Precious little. Syria continues to undermine several strategic U.S. goals in the region, particularly in Iraq, Palestine, and Lebanon. What's more, in the process, Syria is damaging U.S. credibility in the region.

A few examples provide clarity: In 2001 Secretary of State Colin Powell traveled to Damascus to win assurances that Syria would stop illegally importing oil from Iraq. Powell declared victory, but one year later illegal oil imports were up by 50,000 barrels per day. The affronts continued in 2003, when the Syrian government authorized buses to transport military-aged males to Iraq (departing from Damascus Fair Grounds) to fight U.S. forces.

More recently, U.S. credibility has been undercut by Syria's blatant obstruction of the U.N. investigation into Hariri's death. Indeed, on the day the second report was issued, Gibran Tueni--a prominent Lebanese journalist, member of parliament, and leading critic of Syria--was assassinated, also probably by the Syrians.

Finally, there is the issue of Syria's stance on Washington's Middle East democracy-promotion agenda. In the face of the February 2006 U.S. pledge to provide \$5 million to Syrian reformers, Syria has embarked on a crackdown against civil society, arresting dozens of reformers. One individual of whom the regime has made an example is Kamal Labwani. Labwani was arrested in November 2005 following his return from Washington, where he had met with senior administration officials responsible for democracy promotion. President Bush mentioned Labwani in a speech after his arrest. Four months later, Labwani was charged with crimes that carry the death penalty. Implementation of this sentence hangs in the balance.

U.S. inaction on all of these fronts has given Damascus the distinct impression that Washington lacks firmness of purpose. In turn, this has given the Syrians a new lease on life in Lebanon and has rejuvenated the regime's dealings with Palestinian terrorists. If Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's most recent visit to Damascus (in January) is any indication, it also appears to have been a catalyst for a reinvigorated relationship with Iran. Judging from the recent Syrian crackdown on internal democratic opposition, Assad also remains undeterred by U.S. efforts to support reformers in his backyard.

Most troubling, though, is that aside from some cosmetic changes, Syria continues to

lend support to the Iraqi insurgency. Objectively, it would seem that Syria has run the U.S. table.

Despite the administration's rhetorical campaign against Syria, Washington is in no rush to up the ante with Damascus. Which is just fine with the Assads, who have been playing for time for three decades. The sad reality is that with just over 900 days to go and attention focused on Iran, Iraq, and Hamas, the clock is running out for the Bush administration's Syria policy. Of course, this is how Assad planned it. Hunkered down in Damascus, the Baathist regime intends to wait out yet another president. Regrettably, if the past five years are any guide, it will succeed.

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EGYPT

Egyptian Emergency

National Review

By Khairi Abaza

5/16

Once again, the Egyptian regime has responded to violence at home by consolidating the authoritarian structure of the state. On April 30, following two deadly terrorist attacks in the Sinai, President Hosni Mubarak extended the emergency laws that have stifled Egyptian liberties since 1981. Then, just last week, Cairo looked like an army garrison when 10,000 police and security forces cracked down on pro-democracy activists demonstrating to express their support for an independent judiciary.

The Mubarak regime needs to understand that it is the lack of political freedom, transparency, and accountability that has helped breed fanatics willing to perpetrate horrific attacks. Currently, Egyptian civil-society activists are engaged in heated battles for meaningful reforms that will help establish an independent judiciary and a free press--essential pillars of any democracy. If the regime continues to deny these changes, it can expect to face increasing radicalism.

The tension between the regime and the judges and their supporters has increased following calls for reform by Egypt's top judges. Since the 1952 military coup led by Gamal Abdel Nasser, the military-backed authoritarian regime has compromised judicial independence by mandating that the executive branch control judges' budgets, promotions, and bonuses. Consequently, the regime has exerted enormous influence over who becomes a judge and who advances within the system.

Many of Egypt's top judges increased the pressure for more freedoms in 2005 by threatening not to oversee the presidential election, as the Egyptian constitution requires. In response, last February the regime launched an investigation against two of the most obstreperous judges, Hisham al-Bastawisy and Mahmoud Mekky, both from the Court of Cassation, Egypt's highest appeals court. The Judges' Club, an official entity acting as a de facto judges' syndicate, however, created enough of an uproar, through demonstration and mobilization of the opposition, that it hoped

the regime would back down. According to Zakaria Abel-Aziz, head of the Judges' Club, Egypt's judges will not settle for less than the true independence of the judiciary. At the time, the regime promised to issue new laws for the judiciary, but it has yet to deliver.

Journalists, for their part, seek to abolish the reprehensible but common Egyptian practice of imprisoning those who publish criticisms of the regime. Though Egypt enjoys a relatively more open press than other Arab countries, it is far from free. According to Law 93, introduced in 1996, journalists can face up to two years in jail for "publication offences," a vague concept that is manipulated for political ends. Journalists and their syndicate are trying to force the government to abandon prison sentences for publication offences. Recently, two journalists were imprisoned, fueling a heated war of words between the government and the syndicate. Their jailings served as a catalyst for several demonstrations.

The syndicate went as far as to draft a new law that was submitted to the government. Technically, the decision to change the laws that persecute journalists lies in the hands of the parliament, but the ruling National Democratic party delegates will only move if they get instructions from the regime. Two years ago, President Mubarak promised to amend the current law, and the government has pledged issue a new law before the end of the current parliamentary session this spring, but reformers remain skeptical.

Agitation for political change in Egypt is not new. For over a year, nearly all the opposition parties and movements have united under the same banner: to change the outdated, authoritarian, socialist-style constitution; to decrease the power of what is commonly referred to as a "pharoanic" presidency; to increase the authority of a fairly elected parliament and prime minister; to establish a truly independent judiciary and a free press; and to secure the right to create new political parties, demonstrate, and strike without first applying for permission as the emergency laws require.

Mubarak, thus far, has barely flinched. After much internal and external pressure, the Egyptian regime made some cosmetic amendments and permitted the first ever competitive but highly controversial presidential elections in 2005. Large-scale irregularities were reported by judges, civil-society organizations, and the opposition. Before holding free elections, the Egyptian regime should open the political space and allow parties and movements to work in a free and fair environment.

The extension of the emergency laws is a blow to civil liberties and another indication that the regime has no intention of genuinely reforming the political system. No longer satisfied with cosmetic measures aimed at easing American pressure, Egyptians realize that empowering the judiciary and the press could mark the beginning of a true transition to democracy. If the political leadership is genuine about tackling Egypt's security problems at their core, it too will need to recognize that transparency and accountability are the cornerstones of any society that aspires to progress.

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IRAQ

Saddam's Delusions: The View From the Inside

Foreign Affairs

By Kevin Woods, James Lacey, and Williamson Murray

May/June 2006

Summary: A special, double-length article from the upcoming May/June issue of Foreign Affairs, presenting key excerpts from the recently declassified book-length report of the USJFCOM Iraqi Perspectives Project.

Kevin Woods is a defense analyst in Washington, D.C. James Lacey is a military analyst for the U.S. Joint Forces Command. Williamson Murray is Class of 1957 Distinguished Visiting Professor of History at the U.S. Naval Academy. Along with Mark Stout and Michael Pease, they were the principal participants in the USJFCOM Iraqi Perspectives Project.

EDITOR'S NOTE: The fall of Baghdad in April 2003 opened one of the most secretive and brutal governments in history to outside scrutiny. For the first time since the end of World War II, American analysts did not have to guess what had happened on the other side of a conflict but could actually read the defeated enemy's documents and interrogate its leading figures. To make the most of this unique opportunity, the U.S. Joint Forces Command (USJFCOM) commissioned a comprehensive study of the inner workings and behavior of Saddam Hussein's regime based on previously inaccessible primary sources. Drawing on interviews with dozens of captured senior Iraqi military and political leaders and hundreds of thousands of official Iraqi documents (hundreds of them fully translated), this two-year project has changed our understanding of the war from the ground up. The study was partially declassified in late February; its key findings are presented here.

STRATEGIC CALCULUS

Throughout the years of relative external peace for Iraq after Operation Desert Storm, in 1991, Saddam Hussein continued to receive and give credence to optimistic assessments of his regime's prospects dished up by his top military officers. Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz described the dictator as having been "very confident" that the United States would not dare to attack Iraq, and that if it did, it would be defeated. What was the source of Saddam's confidence?

Judging from his private statements, the single most important element in Saddam's strategic calculus was his faith that France and Russia would prevent an invasion by the United States. According to Aziz, Saddam's confidence was firmly rooted in his belief in the nexus between the economic interests of France and Russia and his own strategic goals: "France and Russia each secured millions of dollars worth of trade and service contracts in Iraq, with the implied understanding that their political posture with regard to sanctions on Iraq would be pro-Iraqi. In addition, the French wanted sanctions lifted to safeguard their trade and service contracts in Iraq. Moreover, they wanted to prove their importance in the world as members of the Security Council -- that they could use their veto to show they still had power."

Ibrahim Ahmad Abd al-Sattar, the Iraqi army and armed forces chief of staff, claimed that Saddam believed that even if his international supporters failed him and the United States did launch a ground invasion, Washington would rapidly bow to

international pressure to halt the war. According to his personal interpreter, Saddam also thought his "superior" forces would put up "a heroic resistance and . . . inflict such enormous losses on the Americans that they would stop their advance." Saddam remained convinced that, in his own words, "Iraq will not, in any way, be like Afghanistan. We will not let the war become a picnic for the American or the British soldiers. No way!"

When the coalition assault did come, Saddam stubbornly clung to the belief that the Americans would be satisfied with an outcome short of regime change. According to Sattar, "No Iraqi leaders had believed coalition forces would ever reach Baghdad." Saddam's conviction that his regime would survive the war was the primary reason he did not have his forces torch Iraq's oil fields or open the dams to flood the south, moves many analysts predicted would be among Iraq's first in the event of an invasion. In the words of Aziz, "[Saddam] thought that this war would not lead to this ending." Saddam realized that if his strategic calculus was correct, he would need the oil to prop up the regime. Even with U.S. tanks crossing the Iraqi border, an internal revolt remained Saddam's biggest fear. In order to quell any postwar revolt, he would need the bridges to remain intact and the land in the south to remain unflooded. On this basis, Saddam planned his moves.

Some senior Iraqi military officers did not share their leader's assumptions, taking a more pessimistic view. The director of military intelligence, Zuhayr Talib Abd al-Sattar al-Naqib, commented that except for Saddam and the inner circle, most knowledgeable Iraqis secretly believed that the war would continue all the way to an occupation. The commander of the First Republican Guard Corps admitted, "There was nothing that could have been done to stop the Americans after they began." Sultan Hashim Ahmad al-Tai, the minister of defense, recalled that "Iraqi military professionals were not surprised at U.S. actions at all. We knew what preparations were required, and what would happen if those preparations were not done properly. . . . Even if we had a real defense, we wouldn't have stopped the Americans, but we would have made the price exaggerated."

As late as the end of March 2003, Saddam apparently still believed that the war was going the way he had expected. If Iraq was not actually winning it, neither was it losing -- or at least so it seemed to the dictator. Americans may have listened with amusement to the seemingly obvious fabrications of Muhammad Said al-Sahaf, Iraq's information minister (nicknamed "Baghdad Bob" by the media). But the evidence now clearly shows that Saddam and those around him believed virtually every word issued by their own propaganda machine.

For example, during the first ten days of the war, Iraq asked Russia, France, and China not to support cease-fire initiatives because Saddam believed such moves would legitimize the coalition's presence in Iraq. As late as March 30, Saddam thought that his strategy was working and that the coalition offensive was grinding to a halt. On that day, Lieutenant General Abed Hamid Mahmoud, Saddam's principal secretary, directed the Iraqi foreign minister to tell the French and Russian governments that Baghdad would accept only an "unconditional withdrawal" of U.S. forces because "Iraq is now winning and . . . the United States has sunk in the mud of defeat." At that moment, U.S. tanks were a hundred miles south of Baghdad, refueling and rearming for the final push.

MILITARY EFFECTIVENESS

By 2003, the Iraqi military was reeling from 13 years of almost continuous engagement with U.S. and British air forces, the accumulating effects of sanctions, and the insidious impact of the regime's dysfunctional policies. These pressures had all helped drive the Iraqi military into a state of chronic decline. The Iraqi military's main mission was to ensure the internal security of the Baathist dictatorship. Concerned about everything except fighting wars, the Iraqi military, which had once aspired to a Western-like profession of arms, became focused on militarily irrelevant -- but nonetheless life-and-death -- issues.

The best example of this focus is the prewar condition of the Iraqi air force, which did not launch a single sortie against the coalition during the invasion. According to the commander of Iraq's air force and air defense force, Hamid Raja Shalah, Saddam simply decided two months before the war that the air force would not participate. Apparently, Saddam reasoned that the quality and quantity of the Iraqi air force's equipment would make it worse than useless against coalition air forces. Consequently, he decided to save the air force for future needs and ordered his commanders to hide their aircraft. This decision was yet another indication that Saddam did not believe coalition ground forces would ever reach into the heart of Iraq. He was sure his regime would survive whatever conflict ensued.

To implement Saddam's decision to preserve the air force, the Iraqis moved most of their aircraft away from operational airfields. To hide them from prowling coalition air forces, they camouflaged planes in palm groves or buried them in the sand, from which coalition forces dug them up after the war. Saddam's refusal to use the Iraqi air force is reminiscent of his behavior during Desert Storm, when he ordered a significant portion of the air force to flee to Iran. In 2003, Saddam ruled out Iranian sanctuary, telling aides, "The Iranians are even stronger than before; they now have [part of] our air force." Even with his regime under dire threat, Saddam's thoughts were never far from the regional power balance.

When it came to weapons of mass destruction (WMD), Saddam attempted to convince one audience that they were gone while simultaneously convincing another that Iraq still had them. Coming clean about WMD and using full compliance with inspections to escape from sanctions would have been his best course of action for the long run. Saddam, however, found it impossible to abandon the illusion of having WMD, especially since it played so well in the Arab world.

Ali Hassan al-Majid, known as "Chemical Ali" for his use of chemical weapons on Kurdish civilians in 1987, was convinced Iraq no longer possessed WMD but claims that many within Iraq's ruling circle never stopped believing that the weapons still existed. Even at the highest echelons of the regime, when it came to WMD there was always some element of doubt about the truth. According to Chemical Ali, Saddam was asked about the weapons during a meeting with members of the Revolutionary Command Council. He replied that Iraq did not have WMD but flatly rejected a suggestion that the regime remove all doubts to the contrary, going on to explain that such a declaration might encourage the Israelis to attack. [See Footnote #1 below]

By late 2002, Saddam finally tilted toward trying to persuade the international community that Iraq was cooperating with UN inspectors and that it no longer had WMD programs. As 2002 drew to a close, his regime worked hard to counter anything that might be seen as supporting the coalition's assertion that WMD still remained in Iraq. Saddam was insistent that Iraq would give full access to UN inspectors "in order not to give President Bush any excuses to start a war." But after

years of purposeful obfuscation, it was difficult to convince anyone that Iraq was not once again being economical with the truth.

Ironically, it now appears that some of the actions resulting from Saddam's new policy of cooperation actually helped solidify the coalition's case for war. Over the years, Western intelligence services had obtained many internal Iraqi communications, among them a 1996 memorandum from the director of the Iraqi Intelligence Service directing all subordinates to "insure that there is no equipment, materials, research, studies, or books related to manufacturing of the prohibited weapons (chemical, biological, nuclear, and missiles) in your site." And when UN inspectors went to these research and storage locations, they inevitably discovered lingering evidence of WMD-related programs.

In 2002, therefore, when the United States intercepted a message between two Iraqi Republican Guard Corps commanders discussing the removal of the words "nerve agents" from "the wireless instructions," or learned of instructions to "search the area surrounding the headquarters camp and [the unit] for any chemical agents, make sure the area is free of chemical containers, and write a report on it," U.S. analysts viewed this information through the prism of a decade of prior deceit. They had no way of knowing that this time the information reflected the regime's attempt to ensure it was in compliance with UN resolutions.

What was meant to prevent suspicion thus ended up heightening it. The tidbit about removing the term "nerve agents" from radio instructions was prominently cited as an example of Iraqi bad faith by U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell in his February 5, 2003, statement to the UN.

Another factor reduced Iraq's military effectiveness: sanctions. For more than a dozen years, UN sanctions had frayed the fiber of the Iraqi military by making it difficult for Baghdad to purchase new equipment, procure spare parts, or fund adequate training. Attempts to overcome the effects of the sanctions led Saddam to create the Military Industrial Commission as a means to sustain the military. The commission and a series of subordinate organizations steadily promised new capabilities to offset the effects of poor training, poor morale, and neglected equipment. Saddam apparently waited for the delivery of wonder weapons that would reverse the erosion of his military strength.

A captured Military Industrial Commission annual report of investments made in 2002³¹ showed more than 170 research projects with an estimated budget of about 1.5 percent of Iraq's GDP. The commission divided projects among areas such as equipment, engineering, missiles, electronics, strategic weapons, artillery, and air forces. One senior Iraqi official alleged that the commission's leaders were so fearful of Saddam that when he ordered them to initiate weapons programs that they knew Iraq could not develop, they told him they could accomplish the projects with ease. Later, when Saddam asked for updates on the nonexistent projects, they simply faked plans and designs to show progress.

This constant stream of false reporting undoubtedly accounts for why many of Saddam's calculations on operational, strategic, and political issues made perfect sense to him. According to Aziz, "The people in the Military Industrial Commission were liars. They lied to you, and they lied to Saddam. They were always saying that they were producing or procuring special weapons so that they could get favors out of Saddam -- money, cars, everything -- but they were liars. If they did all of this

business and brought in all of these secret weapons, why didn't [the weapons] work?"

Members of the Military Industrial Commission were not the only liars. Bending the truth was particularly common among the most trusted members of Saddam's inner circle -- especially when negative news might reflect poorly on the teller's abilities or reputation. According to one former high-ranking Baath Party official, "Saddam had an idea about Iraq's conventional and potential unconventional capabilities, but never an accurate one because of the extensive lying occurring in that area. Many reports were falsified. The ministers attempted to convey a positive perspective with reports, which were forwarded to Saddam's secretary, who in turn passed them up to Saddam." In the years before Operation Iraqi Freedom, everyone around Saddam understood that his need to hear only good news was constantly growing and that it was in their best interest to feed that hunger.

A 1982 incident vividly illustrated the danger of telling Saddam what he did not want to hear. At one low point during the Iran-Iraq War, Saddam asked his ministers for candid advice. With some temerity, the minister of health, Riyadh Ibrahim, suggested that Saddam temporarily step down and resume the presidency after peace was established. Saddam had him carted away immediately. The next day, pieces of the minister's chopped-up body were delivered to his wife. According to Abd al-Tawab Mullah Huwaysh, the head of the Military Industrial Commission and a relative of the murdered minister, "This powerfully concentrated the attention of the other ministers, who were unanimous in their insistence that Saddam remain in power."

Within the Iraqi military and the Iraqi regime more generally, rumors circulated that summary execution awaited anyone who dared contradict the dictator. Officers remembered the story of the brigadier general who once spent over a year in prison for daring to suggest that U.S. tanks might be superior to those of the Iraqi army. One senior minister noted, "Directly disagreeing with Saddam Hussein's ideas was unforgivable. It would be suicide." Nor was Saddam alone in his distaste for bad news. According to Major General Hamid Ismail Dawish al-Rubai, the director general of the Republican Guard's general staff, "Any commander who spoke the truth to [Saddam's son] Qusay would lose his head."

Fear of Saddam's reaction to bad news was not limited to his ministers and soldiers. Its pernicious effects reached even into Saddam's immediate family. One former high-level official related the following story about Qusay: "At the end of 2000, it came to Saddam's attention that approximately seventy military vehicles were immobile. Saddam told Qusay to resolve the problem. Republican Guard mechanics claimed they could repair the vehicles if the funds were made available. Qusay agreed to the work, and funds were provided for the task. Once the work was completed, Qusay sent a representative to inspect the vehicles and he found them lined up on a vehicle park, thirty-five vehicles on each side. The vehicles looked like new, having been freshly painted and cleaned".

"After Qusay's representative inspected them, a second inspection was conducted to verify that they were now operational. The staff was told to supply drivers to move all [the] vehicles to the opposite side of the vehicle park to ensure they were in working order. None of the seventy vehicles would start. When this was reported to Qusay, he instructed that Saddam not be informed, as Qusay had already told Saddam that the vehicles were operational. "In the end, Qusay did not order

mechanics to fix the vehicles -- it appears that he was eager only to hide this failure from his father.

Besides outright lying, there were further impediments to the flow of information within the regime. One was the requirement to embellish even the simplest message with praise for Saddam, as evidenced by the minister of defense's memo following a training exercise called Golden Falcon: "In reference to your Excellency's instructions regarding the large exercises at the Public Center, having strong faith in the only God of our hearts, and God's permanent support to the believers, the faithful, the steadfast, and with great love that we have for our great homeland and our Great Leader, our Great Leader has won God's favor and the love of his dear people in the day of the grand homage.

"Your enthusiastic soldiers from our courageous armed forces have executed Golden Falcon Exercise number 11. In this exercise we have tested our readiness and confrontation plans against any who attempt to make impure the lands of civilization and the homeland of missions and prophets. This exercise is the widest and most successful in achieving the required results. Soldiers from the III and IV Corps have participated in this exercise. "There is no indication that the two corps actually conducted any significant exercise during this period.

This kind of bureaucratic embellishment extended to every level of military organization. While this type of flowery language is not unknown in the region, it was taken to such extremes in Iraq that it often replaced all substance in reports and orders. For example, a March 9, 2003, instruction from the Imam al Hussein Brigade to one of its combat groups read, "The Third Group, al Quds Army . . . and other formations attached to it are fighting valiantly, placing their trust in God Almighty, until the end that He prescribes, which God willing will be the enemy's defeat and his withdrawal, and a victory for us that will please our friends and grieve our enemies."

After the war, several of the more capable military commanders commonly noted four other factors that seriously affected military readiness: the mostly irrelevant military guidance passed from the political leadership to the lowest level of military operations, the creation of "popular" militias, the tendency of Saddam's relatives and sycophants to rise to the top national security positions, and the combined effects of the onerous security apparatus and the resulting limitations on military authority. Many senior Iraqi military officers blamed this "coup-proofing" of the regime for most of what befell the Iraqi army during Operation Iraqi Freedom.

IRRELEVANT GUIDANCE

A close associate once described Saddam as a deep thinker who lay awake at night pondering problems at length before inspiration came to him in dreams. These dreams became dictates the next morning, and invariably all those around Saddam would praise his great intuition. Questioning his dictates brought great personal risk. Often, the dictator would make a show of consulting small groups of family members and longtime advisers, although his record even here is erratic. All of the evidence demonstrates that he made his most fateful decisions in isolation. He decided to invade Iran, for example, without any consultation with his advisers and while he was visiting a vacation resort. He made the equally fateful decision to invade Kuwait after discussing it with only his son-in-law.

In a wide-ranging discussion with his closest advisers in the fall of 1990, Saddam provided an insight into his "unique" abilities: "America is a complicated country.

Understanding it requires a politician's alertness that is beyond the intelligence community. Actually, I forbade the intelligence outfits from deducing from press and political analysis anything about America. I told them that [this] was not their specialty, because these organizations, when they are unable to find hard facts, start deducing from newspapers, which is what I already know. I said I don't want either intelligence organization [the Iraqi Intelligence Service or the General Military Intelligence Directorate] to give me analysis -- that is my specialty. . . . We agree to continue on that basis . . . which is what I used with the Iranians, some of it out of deduction and some of it through invention and connecting the dots, all without having hard evidence."

After 1991, Saddam's confidence in his military commanders steadily eroded, while his confidence in his own abilities as a military genius strengthened. Like a number of other despots in history who dabbled in military affairs, Saddam began to issue a seemingly endless stream of banal instructions. He could not resist giving detailed training guidance.

Dozens of surviving memoranda echo the style and content of a 2002 top-secret document titled "Training Guidance to the Republican Guard." These documents all hint at the kind of guidance military officers received from Saddam on a regular basis. One chapter of the "training guidance" document, called "Notes and Directions Given by Saddam Hussein to His Elite Soldiers to Cover the Tactics of War," charged officers to do the following: "Train in a way that allows you to defeat your enemy; train all units' members in swimming; train your soldiers to climb palm trees so that they may use these places for navigation and sniper shooting; and train on smart weapons."

In the aftermath of the 1991 war, the Iraqi military made extensive efforts to "learn" from its experiences during Desert Storm. These attempts were hampered by Saddam's conviction that his ground forces had performed well in the fighting. This certainty forced officers compiling Iraqi lessons-learned analyses to avoid issues that might involve Saddam's prestige or question the Iraqi forces' fighting abilities. Instead, they focused on peripheral issues that were almost totally irrelevant to winning wars. These restrictions led to some perverse claims, such as that the Republican Guard had actually performed well in the war by avoiding annihilation: "If it were not for these precautions, we would have suffered great loss, but when we compare our losses with the large number of fighter aircraft, missiles, and artillery bombing that the Iraqi army was subject to we find these losses trifling. That proved that the Republican Guards and the armed forces managed to reduce the danger from air strikes." Such briefings drove home the point that Iraq had done well in Desert Storm (at least on the issues that mattered most to the regime). In a short time, the constant praise for Iraq's tactics during the war -- digging deep bunkers and dispersing and hiding the Iraqi army -- made them into de facto operational doctrine.

Little evidence exists that any of the politicized Iraqi generals understood the advantages in maneuverability, speed, command and control, or training that the U.S. forces enjoyed. By the time the military was ready to brief Saddam on the lessons of the Persian Gulf War, however, they did fully understand the danger of presenting him with claims other than those he already believed. Truthful analyses therefore gave way to belittlement of the U.S. victory and denials that the United States had any advantage over Iraq other than in military technology. One comment made by an Iraqi general during a mid-1990s conference was typical: "After the liberation of our land in Kuwait, and despite the fact that more than 30 countries

headed by the occupation forces of the U.S. rushed madly upon our Republican Guard, our performance was heroic."

THE RISE OF PARAMILITARY FORCES

It is hard to overestimate the effects that the Shiite and Kurdish uprisings of 1991 had on Saddam's outlook. After that point, the threat of another uprising consistently remained his top security concern. One of the precautions he took to prevent and, if necessary, quell a future disturbance was to create private armies made up of politically reliable troops: the Saddam Fedayeen, the al Quds Army, and the Baath Party militia. Ironically, these organizations actually worsened national security by making army recruitment more difficult and by stripping the military of needed equipment. And when they eventually went to battle against the onrushing coalition forces, they were obliterated in short order.

Most Western analysts have argued that Saddam created these militias to help defend Iraq from external attack. Documents obtained after Operation Iraqi Freedom, however, indicate that the original and primary purpose of the paramilitary forces had little to do with protecting Iraq from invasion. The militias were indeed charged with that task -- but only later on, after Saddam became fascinated with the success of the Palestinian intifadas and with the U.S. experience in Somalia. The original and primary purpose of the paramilitary groups was to defend Iraq from internal enemies, not external ones.

The al Quds Army ("al Quds" is Arabic for "Jerusalem") was a regional militia created to control particular areas of Iraq and crush as rapidly as possible any disturbance that occurred. The best evidence suggests that close to 500,000 Iraqis joined the al Quds force, albeit with widely varying degrees of commitment. As to its value as a military force in times of war, the minister of defense best expressed the view of his colleagues when he said, "The Quds force was a headache, they had no equipment for a serious war, and their creation was a bad idea. The Ministry of Defense was required to give them weapons that were taken from the real army. But the army had no control of them. Their instructions came only from the president's office and not from normal military channels."

According to another senior Iraqi general, the al Quds Army was not a serious combat force: "It never had anything to do with the liberation of Jerusalem or fighting the Zionists, and was merely another organ of regime protection." Nonetheless, once the war began, Saddam's flattery machine cranked out boasts, half-truths, and outright lies about the abilities and performance of the al Quds force. Saddam fully expected the militia's members to fight like lions and to bleed the Americans dry, and no one was courageous enough to tell him when they failed to do so. Reports such as this one, from a public release by the Iraqi army's general command, were typical: "A hostile force backed by jet fighters and helicopters attempted to approach the outskirts of the al Muthanna Governate. Our unrivaled men of the al Quds Army confronted it and forced it to stop and then retreat. They inflicted on it huge human and equipment losses. This included the destruction of seven vehicles of various types. Congratulations to the al Quds Army on its absolute victory over the allies of the wicked Zionists." That this event never happened as described was immaterial to the Baathist command. The reality that Saddam's inner circle refused to tell him was that the al Quds force started dissolving as soon as U.S. tanks approached. By the time coalition forces arrived at many of the militia's defensive positions, Saddam's vaunted warriors had vanished.

Whereas the al Quds Army was a part-time territorial defense force meant for use in times of crisis, the Saddam Fedayeen was a permanent force tasked with a number of state security missions. Before the war, coalition planners believed that the Saddam Fedayeen was a paramilitary group with wide-ranging missions including counterinsurgency, domestic direct action, and surveillance. They also understood that it would serve as a backup to the regular army and the al Quds Army in case of a local uprising. Such assessments were generally correct but somewhat out of focus.

It is now clear that Saddam created the Fedayeen in October 1994 in reaction to the Shiite and Kurdish uprisings of March 1991. Those revolts had revealed the potentially fatal flaws in Saddam's internal security apparatus: the local Baath Party organs were not capable of putting down uprisings without external support, the Iraqi armed forces were unable or unwilling to suppress rebellions with sufficient speed and ruthlessness, and the tribes of Iraq still represented a significant threat to Baghdad's control, even after more than 25 years of pan-Arabic socialist indoctrination. The fanatically loyal Saddam Fedayeen was created to remedy such problems and ensure that any future revolt would be rapidly crushed.

According to Saddam Fedayeen planning documents captured by the coalition, the mission of this militia was to protect Iraq "from any threats inside and outside." Meticulous Saddam Fedayeen records list numerous operations conducted in the decade after the militia's creation: "extermination operations" against saboteurs in Muthanna, an operation to "ambush and arrest" car thieves in Anbar, the monitoring of Shiite civilians at the holy places of Karbala, and a plan to bomb a humanitarian-aid outpost in Erbil, which the Iraqi secret police suspected of being a Western intelligence operation.

The Saddam Fedayeen also took part in the regime's domestic terrorism operations and planned for attacks throughout Europe and the Middle East. In a document dated May 1999, Saddam's older son, Uday, ordered preparations for "special operations, assassinations, and bombings, for the centers and traitor symbols in London, Iran and the self-ruled areas [Kurdistan]." Preparations for "Blessed July," a regime-directed wave of "martyrdom" operations against targets in the West, were well under way at the time of the coalition invasion.

In a typical Iraqi pattern, corruption soon worked its way into the Saddam Fedayeen. Despite enjoying regular showers of cash, on-the-spot bonuses for successful missions, educational benefits, military privileges if injured, martyr privileges if killed, and free land just for volunteering, a number of Saddam Fedayeen paramilitaries still joined the growing underground economy. In 2001, reports surfaced that members of the organization were smuggling weapons to the Saudi border, where they sold them for cash, and were establishing roadblocks in order to shake down travelers.

These failures of discipline elicited a harsh response from the regime. Punishments of errant militiamen included having one's hands amputated for theft, being tossed off a tower for sodomy, being whipped a hundred times for sexual harassment, having one's tongue cut out for lying, and being stoned for various other infractions. It was only a matter of time before military failure also became punishable as a criminal offense.

In typical Iraqi bureaucratic fashion, a table of specific failures and their punishments was created and approved. In 1998, the secretariat of the Saddam Fedayeen issued

the following "regulations for when an execution order against the commanders of the various Fedayeen" units should be carried out: "Any section commander will be executed, if his section is defeated; any platoon commander will be executed, if two of his sections are defeated; any company commander will be executed, if two of his platoons are defeated; any regiment commander will be executed, if two of his companies are defeated; any area commander will be executed, if his Governate is defeated; any Saddam Fedayeen fighter, including commanders, will be executed, if he hesitates in completing his duties, cooperates with the enemy, gives up his weapons, or hides any information concerning the security of the state." No wonder that members of the Saddam Fedayeen often proved to be Iraq's most fanatical fighters during the 2003 war. On numerous occasions, Fedayeen forces hurled themselves against the coalition's armored columns as they rushed past the southern cities of Samawah, Najaf, and Karbala, and they even tried to block the coalition from entering Baghdad itself -- long after the Republican Guard had mostly quit the field. In the years preceding the coalition invasion, Iraq's leaders had become enamored of the belief that the spirit of the Fedayeen's "Arab warriors" would allow them to overcome the Americans' advantages. In the end, however, the Fedayeen fighters proved totally unprepared for the kind of war they were asked to fight, and they died by the thousands.

RELATIVES AND SYCOPHANTS

Saddam truly trusted only one person: himself. As a result, he concentrated more and more power in his own hands. No single man could do everything, however; forced to enlist the help of others to handle operational details, Saddam used a remarkable set of hiring criteria. As one senior Iraqi leader noted, Saddam selected the "uneducated, untalented, and those who posed no threat to his leadership for key roles." Always wary of a potential coup, Saddam remained reluctant to entrust military authority to anyone too far removed from his family or tribe.

Western observers may have considered the Republican Guard to be a bulwark of the regime, but Saddam saw it as the military force best positioned to overthrow him. As a result, in 2001 he placed Qusay at its head, making his youngest son the commander of Iraq's most elite combat units -- even though Qusay's military experience was limited to a short stint at the Iranian front in 1984, where he had experienced little if any real combat. The minister of defense described the situation this way: "My working for Qusay Hussein was a mistake; Qusay knew nothing -- he understood only simple military things like a civilian. We prepared information and advice for him and he'd accept it or not. As the ultimate commander of the Republican Guard, Qusay could take advice from professional military officers in the Ministry of Defense and the Republican Guard or ignore it to make decisions." Qusay had the final say on significant military decisions unless Saddam himself chose to intervene. Qusay's purview included such fundamental matters as what key terrain to defend and, during the war, when and how to shift Iraq's remaining forces. Several senior officers privately questioned many of his decisions, but few were willing to do so in an open forum.

After the war, senior military officers constantly remarked on Qusay's lack of military knowledge and his unwillingness to take their "good" advice. But even these flaws were not sufficient to explain everything that went wrong. The evidence shows that many of Qusay's advisers were also unqualified, while those who were qualified often kept silent even when given an opportunity to speak.

Major General Barzan Abd al-Ghafur Sulayman Majid, commander of the Special Republican Guard, was fairly representative. Before the war, coalition planners generally assumed that the quality of Iraqi military officers improved as one moved up the military hierarchy, from the militias to the regular army, to the Republican Guard, and then to the Special Republican Guard. It stood to reason that the commander of the Special Republican Guard -- Iraq's most elite fighting force -- would be highly competent and loyal. In fact, after the war, Barzan's peers and colleagues were all openly derisive of his abilities. Saddam had selected Barzan, one general noted, because Barzan had several qualities that Saddam held dear. "He was Saddam's cousin, but he had two other important qualities which made him the best man for the job," this general said. "First, he was not intelligent enough to represent a threat to the regime, and second, he was not brave enough to participate in anyone else's plots."

Barzan himself was well aware of the tenuous nature of his position. In an interview after the war, he described his appointment: "I was called to Baghdad from holiday and told that I would be taking command of the Special Republican Guard. I was on a probationary status for the first six months. I was ordered by Saddam to take the command; I had no choice. I was sick at the idea of being the Special Republican Guard commander. It was the most dangerous job in the regime." This general, the man who was to command the last stand of Saddam's most impressive military forces, spent most of the war hiding.

General Tai, the minister of defense, was a striking exception to this rule. Here, by all accounts, was a competent military commander. His elevation to minister of defense apparently changed him, however. The specific reasons for his change are no doubt complex, but his actions during the meetings and planning conferences prior to the coalition invasion suggest an explanation. In one telling event during the final planning, he remained silent when more junior officers voiced concerns over Saddam's new plan for the defense of Iraq. As one corps commander who was there later noted, "Some of the senior military leaders present only competed to please Saddam. The Minister of Defense was an honorable man but he gave up his strategic vision in order to keep Saddam's favor."

At the end of 2002, Saddam once again asserted himself, putting into place his own operational concept for Iraq's defense -- a concept that would ultimately hasten the destruction of the Iraqi armed forces. On December 18, the chief of staff of the Republican Guard gathered his commanders together and told them of the new plan. It was both original and bold -- and totally impractical. In a postwar interview, the commander of the Second Republican Guard Corps told how the new plan was announced: "The Republican Guard chief of staff called all the commanders to meet at the Republican Guard Command Center. When I asked why, I was told that they had a new plan for the defense of Baghdad. I thought to myself that we were supposed to be defending all of Iraq, not just Baghdad. When we got there, we found that Qusay Hussein was also present.

"The Republican Guard chief of staff briefed us in front of a large wall map that covered just the central portion of Iraq. The map showed Baghdad in the center with four rings. Every ring had a color. The center ring was red. Approximately ten kilometers out from the red ring was a blue ring. Then approximately seven kilometers out from that one was a black ring. Finally, the last circle was marked in yellow, which was designated for reconnaissance forces only. The Republican Guard chief of staff explained the plan in a very crude and ugly way. Things like 'the Republican Guard Hammurabi Division defends in the north of the city, the

Republican Guard Medina Division in the south, the Republican Guard al Nida Division in the east, and special forces and the Special Republican Guard in the west.'

"When the Americans arrived at the first ring, on the order from Saddam, the forces would conduct a simultaneous withdrawal. The units would then repeat this 'procedure' until reaching the red circle. Once in the red circle, the remaining units would fight to the death.

"With this incredible simplicity and stupidity, the assembled Republican Guard officers were told that this was the plan for the defense of our country. Qusay said that the plan was already approved by Saddam and 'it was you who would now make it work.' I disagreed and told Qusay that a proud army with an 82-year history cannot fight like this. We were not using our experience. I was told by Qusay that there would be no changes because Saddam had signed the plan already."

Compared to previous defense arrangements drawn up by professional military staffs, this new plan was amateurish. It paid no attention to basic military factors, such as geography, nor did it explain how all the units would be able to retreat simultaneously from one ring to the next while being engaged on the ground and assaulted from the air. Even after Qusay and the Republican Guard's chief of staff briefed their officers on the concept, the senior military leadership did little to arrange for it to be implemented. For Saddam, issuing a decree was considered enough to make the plan work.

SECURITY AND COMMAND LIMITATIONS

While most of Iraq's senior military leaders fell prey to the corrupting influences of the regime's inner circle, other factors combined to undermine the effectiveness of subordinate leaders and units. The commander of the Baghdad Division of the Republican Guard provided an example of how hard it was to function: "In the Republican Guard, division and corps commanders could not make decisions without the approval of the staff command. Division commanders could only move small elements within their command. Major movements such as brigade-sized elements and higher had to be requested through the corps commander to the staff command. This process did not change during the war and in fact became more centralized."

Every senior commander interviewed after hostilities emphasized the psychological costs of being forced to constantly look over his shoulder. At any one time, each of these military commanders had to contend with at least five major security organizations, including the Special Security Office, the Iraqi Intelligence Service, the General Military Intelligence Directorate, and various security service offices within the Republican Guard bureaucracy. Moreover, the number of security personnel in each of these organizations increased dramatically after 1991. In many cases, new spies were sent to units to report on the spies already there.

The Second Republican Guard Corps commander described the influence of the internal security environment on a typical corps-level staff meeting: "First a meeting would be announced and all the corps-level staff, the subordinate division commanders, and selected staff, as well as supporting or attached organizations and their staffs, would assemble at the corps headquarters. The corps commander had to ensure then that all the spies were in the room before the meeting began so that there would not be any suspicions in Baghdad as to my purpose. This kind of attention to my own internal security was required. I spent considerable time finding clever ways to invite even the spies I was not supposed to know about." The target

of all of this internal spying, the corps commander, was forced to coordinate the surreptitious activities of the various persons spying on him. If he accidentally excluded any of these spies from a "secret" meeting, it could provoke intense, quite possibly dangerous, suspicion in Baghdad.

Such a lack of trust had a direct effect not only on the ability of commanders to lead their units, but also on the ability of units to take advantage of their knowledge of the ground to prepare optimal defenses. In many cases, staff officers in Baghdad who had never visited particular areas still were the ones who gave precise deployment directions for even the smallest units.

The commander of the Second Republican Guard Corps echoed the problems described by the commander of the Baghdad Division: "I had to ask for permission from the Republican Guard staff in Baghdad to move brigade-size units and was still doing so up until April 2 and 3 [2003]." By then, coalition forces were making their final drive toward Baghdad.

Not quite every commander had to endure such restrictions. Leaders of the al Nida Division, for example -- an armored division of the Republic Guard -- enjoyed unusual liberty. Tasked with defending Baghdad's eastern approaches against possible attacks from Iran, the al Nida Division was considered by both Iraqi and coalition intelligence organizations to be the best of the best. According to the division's chief of staff, its materiel readiness was the best in the Iraqi military, and its commander planned and conducted training virtually independent of any higher authority. Such autonomy was unheard of elsewhere, including in al Nida's sister unit, the Baghdad Division. When asked in a postwar interview to explain the disparity between the authority he exercised and that exercised by other divisional commanders, al Nida's commander answered in an incredulous tone, "I am a Tikriti [from Saddam's hometown] and other commanders were not."

Yet constant surveillance was the rule. As one officer explained, "All phones in the Republican Guard office were monitored and all meetings were recorded. High-ranking officers were subjected to constant technical monitoring and surveillance in and out of their homes. The Republican Guard Security Office monitored all aspects of senior Republican Guard officers' lives, including their financial affairs and diet. Republican Guard Security Office personnel even questioned the guards at senior officers' houses to see what they could learn about the officers' lifestyles. The Special Security Office knew how many times I went to the bathroom. Republican Guard commanders were not trusted to conduct any movement or even so much as start a tank without permission. Requesting retirement was impossible because the regime would assume one opposed them politically, and one would be arrested and jailed."

There were two common reactions to the pervasive security apparatus. The first was to work through the fog of suspicion and maintain as open a process as possible, while still attempting to command a military unit on the brink of war. Operating in this manner often required extreme precautions. The commander of the Second Republican Guard Corps, for instance, held most of his private meetings in the walled garden of a private home where he could be relatively sure that the regime's spies could not eavesdrop on him. The second reaction, more common among senior leaders, was to avoid any actions, activities, or circumstances that might invite suspicion from the various "eyes" of the regime.

The net effect of such reactions was that corps-level operational command and control disappeared from the battlefield. The restrictions imposed on Iraq's officers

during peacetime and the general atmosphere of fear made it impossible to coordinate action during war. By consistently sacrificing military effectiveness for the supposedly more important needs of internal security, the regime effectively neutered its military, which ultimately proved incapable of standing up to the disciplined and competent coalition forces.

LAST DAYS

In the end, Saddam determined that the most important factor for military success lay in the spirit of the warrior. Saddam considered instilling ideological commitment to the Baathist cause to be the best way to prepare Iraq's soldiers for war. Saddam told his officers that Allah wanted to insult the United States by giving his strongest personal abilities to the materially weak Iraqis. Because Saddam perceived the Baathist spirit of the Iraqi warrior to be far superior to anything American soldiers were capable of bringing to the battlefield, he overlooked the many factors eroding the foundation of his military's effectiveness.

The conclusion of an Iraqi training manual sums up the regime's attitude. "Military power," it reads, "is measured by the period in which difficulties become severe, calamities increase, choices multiply, and the world gets dark and nothing remains except the bright light of belief and ideological determination. . . . If [a soldier] ignores [his] values, principles, and ideals, all military foundations [will] collapse. He will be defeated, shamed, and [his] military honor will remain in the same place together with the booty taken by the enemy. The President, the Leader Saddam Hussein asks, 'Would men allow for their military honor to be taken by the enemy as booty from the battle?' "Iraq's was not the first army to place "spirit" over the reality of firepower and steel, and it is unlikely to be the last.

Much of the debate on the origins of the postwar insurgency in Iraq has centered on the question of whether Saddam's regime placed munitions around the country to support a future guerrilla war against an external foe. There is no significant documentary evidence to suggest it did so. Rather, what is clear is that the regime ordered the distribution of ammunition in order to preserve it for a prolonged war with coalition forces.

As far as can be determined from the interviews and records reviewed so far, there was no national plan to embark on a guerrilla war in the event of a military defeat. Nor did the regime appear to cobble together such a plan as its world crumbled around it. Buoyed by his earlier conviction that the Americans would never dare enter Baghdad, Saddam hoped to the very last minute that he could stay in power. And his military and civilian bureaucrats went through their daily routines until the very end.

Only slowly did Saddam and those around him finally seem to realize that they were suffering a catastrophic military defeat. In the regime's final days, the only decisive actions those at the top seemed capable of were attempts to stem the flow of bad news. For instance, a Ministry of Defense memorandum dated April 6 told subordinate units, "We are doing great," and reminded all staff officers to "avoid exaggerating the enemy's abilities." By that point, Iraq's military forces had already collapsed or were collapsing. Coalition attacks had destroyed almost all of the corps and division headquarters, and the few that remained had been rendered ineffective by the furious pace of the U.S. advance. Although some isolated Iraqi units continued to fight, they were no longer connected to a coherent military organization.

According to Deputy Prime Minister Aziz, by then even Saddam had finally accepted that the end was near. On that day, he called a meeting of the Iraqi leadership at a house in central Baghdad. During the meeting, according to Aziz, Saddam's tone was that of a man "who had lost his will to resist" and "knew the regime was coming to an end." Later that day, Saddam traveled to another safe house a few miles away (he changed locations every three to six hours). There he met with his personal secretary, his two sons, the minister of defense, and the chiefs of staff of the al Quds Army, the Republican Guard, and the Saddam Fedayeen. It was almost midnight, and according to those present, the combination of some accurate battlefield reports and Western satellite news broadcasts had finally made it impossible to ignore their dire predicament.

Yet Saddam began giving orders to deploy and maneuver formations that had ceased to exist. His attention focused on plans to have the Republican Guard enter Baghdad and join with the Saddam Fedayeen in "preparing" for urban warfare. Late the next day, Saddam met again with his closest advisers and, according to a participant, accepted that "the army divisions were no longer capable of defending Baghdad, and that he would have a meeting with the Baath Regional Commanders to enlist them in the final defense of the regime." A subsequent meeting on the same day produced an unexecuted plan to divide Baghdad into four quadrants. Saddam placed loyal Baath Party stalwarts in command of each sector and charged them with defending the city to their last drops of blood.

By the time Saddam spoke to his military staff, however, a U.S. armored brigade had already captured Baghdad's airport. As he discussed the plan for the final defense of the city, another brigade of U.S. armor was busily chewing up the manicured lawn in front of his central palace.

The Sistani Paradox

Weekly Standard
By Duncan Currie
5/10

AMIDST ALL THE WRANGLING over our troubles in Iraq, on one point there is surprising consensus: Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, the pro-democracy Shiite leader, has been an indispensable anchor for Iraq's fissiparous political system. In March of 2005, New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman went so far as to endorse Sistani for the Nobel Peace Prize. "The process of democratizing the Arab world is going to be long and bumpy," wrote Friedman. "But the chances for success are immeasurably improved when we have partners from within the region who are legitimate, but have progressive instincts. That is Mr. Sistani."

Along with "moderate" and "democratic," "progressive" is the label most frequently affixed to Sistani by his Western boosters, many of whom gushed over the Iraqi cleric last February when he roundly condemned the rioting and mayhem that broke out in response to the Danish cartoons of Muhammad. Sistani is the Great Shiite Hope--which means he's also the Great Iraqi Hope. And, as such, it is only fitting that he embodies the awkward reality of Middle Eastern "moderates."

Without putting too fine a point on it, Sistani's thoughts on such social issues as, say, homosexuality, make Pat Robertson look like Barney Frank. Ditto his unusual brand of religious "tolerance." To be sure, none of this detracts from Sistani's

staunch--and courageous--support for representative government, or his benign influence over Iraq's Shiite majority. But it does suggest that Americans, especially those of us gung-ho on spreading liberalism in the Muslim world, perhaps need to recalibrate our expectations for an Islamic democracy.

Take the recent news that a Baghdad teenager was brutally murdered by Iraqi police for the "offense" of being gay. How did Sistani, Iraq's much ballyhooed "progressive," respond? Well, it turned out that some two months earlier Sistani had posted a fatwa on his website, sistani.org, demanding that homosexuals "should be killed in the worst, most severe way of killing." According to the London Independent, "Ali Hili, the co-ordinator of a group of exiled Iraqi gay men who monitor homophobic attacks inside Iraq, said the fatwa had instigated a 'witch-hunt of lesbian and gay Iraqis, including violent beatings, kidnappings and assassinations.'"

Such stories belie the (always fatuous) notion that the "soft" Islamists are somehow ideological brethren of America's Christian Right. Opposing legal recognition of homosexual relationships, or defending the linkage between marriage and procreation, can hardly be conflated with a solicitation for murder. In other words, if you consider the "Christianists" and "theocons" a rabble of inveterate bigots, don't look too closely at what Ayatollah Sistani has to say.

Definitely don't look at his web page. A quick troll through Sistani Online reveals that all those who do not believe in "Allah and His Oneness" are infidels, and as such are deemed "najis" (or "unclean"). Jews and Christians may or may not be najis, but either way "it is better to avoid them."

Then there's Sistani's official representative in the United States, a charming bloke named Sheikh Fadhel al-Sahlani. This past January, Sahlani told the New York Sun that the Holocaust "has been exaggerated," which is why he endorsed Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's proposed Holocaust "conference" in Tehran. As for Ahmadinejad's call that Israel be "wiped off the map"? Right idea, just too impractical, said the Queens-based imam. "It is a kind of dream, but we have to be realistic. Even we have to accept a fact that we don't like."

On the other hand, as journalist Walter Ruby has noted, Sahlani rejects suicide bombing, favors Western-style democracy over Iranian-style theocracy, and supports the continued presence of U.S. troops on Iraqi soil. So does Ayatollah Sistani. Iraq's most senior Shiite cleric will invariably offend liberal sensibilities, and may at times come off as a bit loony. Iraq's secular parties are surely more comforting to the Western palette. But as the December 15th elections proved, such nonreligious groups do not, as of now, command broad popular support among Iraqis. The various Islamist factions do. This is largely because the Baathists gave secular rule a bad name, and because the local mosque was the one institution in Saddam's Iraq where people could organize and speak freely.

The notion of Islamists taking power thanks to U.S. efforts at first seems a bitter irony. As Reuel Marc Gerechta has put it, Americans may look at the turbaned religious parties that dominate Iraq and Afghanistan's nascent parliaments and wonder, "We have gone to war for this?" But such parties signify a vital prerequisite for the liberalization of Middle Eastern societies, Gerechta argues. "Democracy will eventually succeed if the traditional community--particularly the religious classes and what is often called, somewhat inaccurately, the fundamentalist movement--

becomes part of the great democratic debate." So long as the religious classes remain outside that debate, it will be difficult for America to convince ordinary Arabs and Muslims that, yes, Islam is compatible with democracy.

More pragmatically, nation-building amidst a violent insurgency demands prudence, compromise, and a willingness to accept the human timber available. Whether we like it or not, devout Muslims--not, alas, liberal secularists--offer the best hope for salvaging Iraq's democratic experiment, because they represent broad swathes of Iraqi opinion. Getting them to squabble peacefully over their grievances in a freely elected parliament is the crucial antidote to Zarqawi's poisonous vision of chaos and terrorism. Put another way: Trimming the ranks of bin Ladenites, in Iraq as elsewhere, requires giving potential recruits a domestic political alternative.

This hardly means democracy is a foolproof solution. The challenge for post-Saddam Iraq will be to define the "national interest" broadly enough to mollify Kurdish and Sunni angst, and to gradually forge a public consensus behind a more tolerant, moderate interpretation of Islam that permits the growth of civil society. The West cannot make this happen. But we can push for constitutional government that enshrines minority rights into law, protects certain basic freedoms, and accomodates the vacillating trends of popular will. And we can stand by as the essential guardian of that government in its fitful infant stages. This is what, despite its many blunders along the way, the Bush administration has done in Iraq.

Ayatollah Sistani may be an imperfect vehicle for achieving our goals. (It is indeed depressing what passes for a "progressive" in the Muslim Middle East.) But he is a robust democrat who condemns terrorism and fervently wants to breach Islam's separation from the modern world. In the great struggle of our time, that surely places Sistani on the side of the angels.

Duncan Currie is a reporter at The Weekly Standard.

Numbers Game

Weekly Standard

By Max Boot

5/24

THE INAUGURATION of a coalition government suggests that the situation in Iraq is not as gloomy as some opponents of the war claim. But the aftermath also shows that the situation is not as sunny as some supporters of the war believe.

At least 30 people were killed in a series of bombings and shootings in Baghdad on Sunday; many more were injured. By Baghdad standards, that was not an exceptional day. But in just about any other city on the planet, it would be off the charts. By way of comparison, Los Angeles County (population 10 million) averaged 1.4 homicides a day in 2005.

Supporters of the war note that much of the violence in Iraq is confined to four of 18 provinces. True. But you can't ignore the continuing instability in the capital. Baghdad is much more important to Iraq than Washington is to the United States. With at least 6 million residents, it has a quarter of the country's population, and it is not only the political capital but the center of media, business and culture.

That's why anyone who cares about the future of Iraq should be alarmed by the postings of a pro-democracy Iraqi blogger named Alaa at messopotamian.blogspot.com. "The situation in Baghdad is deteriorating from day to day," he writes. "Very soon, if this situation continues like this, the city is going to be brought to a complete standstill and paralysis. . . . Whole sections of the city have virtually fallen to gangs and terrorists."

Omar Fadhil, another pro-democracy resident of Baghdad who blogs at iraqthemodel.blogspot.com, pleads for security forces to do more to bring the capital under control. He suggests doing "intense cordon and search operations," neighborhood by neighborhood, and setting up "tough checkpoints" on every road leading in and out of the city to "inspect each and every passenger and vehicle" until "all of Baghdad becomes secure."

Fadhil's idea is straight from the classic counterinsurgency playbook. This kind of "clear and hold" strategy has succeeded in countless countries, most recently in Iraq, where a variant was used last year by the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment to pacify Tall Afar, a Sunni city in western Iraq. What worked in Tall Afar could work in Baghdad--if the American and Iraqi governments were to provide more troops.

The pacification of Tall Afar, a town of at least 150,000, required 3,800 American and 5,000 Iraqi soldiers. That's a ratio of one American per 40 civilians. In Baghdad, there are currently three American combat brigades, or about 8,600 troops. That's a ratio of one American per 698 civilians. No wonder the capital is so unsafe.

Even if you add in Iraqi security forces--about 9,000 Iraqi soldiers and 12,000 national police officers are deployed in Baghdad--there is still a woeful shortage of security. The problem is compounded by the fact that many of the uniformed Iraqis belong to political militias, criminal gangs or insurgent groups. Residents don't know whom to trust.

TO GAIN control of the situation, an American officer who has served in Baghdad suggested to me the need to deploy at least 35,000 U.S. troops (six brigade combat teams, plus support personnel), two Iraqi army divisions (20,000 men), and 30,000 competent Iraqi police officers. That would give you a total of 85,000 security personnel, or one per 71 inhabitants--still lower than the ratio in Tall Afar but much higher than it is today.

Although the U.S. Army and Marine Corps are badly overstretched (they should have been enlarged years ago), they could still provide at least three more brigades for Baghdad. But the odds of that happening are slim. Since U.S. troops entered Baghdad in April 2003, the primary imperative of Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld and his senior generals has been not to win the war but to minimize U.S. troop presence. There are legitimate reasons for not being heavy-handed, but the upshot is that there are enough American troops in Iraq (130,000) to aggravate the locals but not enough to restore law and order.

On those few occasions when troop levels have been temporarily increased (around election time), there has been an improvement in safety. But Rumsfeld seems determined to ignore this lesson. Unless the administration rethinks its dogmatic aversion to more boots on the ground, the new Iraqi government will be hard put to protect its people.

Max Boot is a contributing editor to The Weekly Standard and a columnist for the Los Angeles Times. This column originally appeared in the May 24, 2006 edition of the Los Angeles Times.

A Plan for Victory in Iraq

Weekly Standard

By Frederick W. Kagan

5/29

In eastern Ramadi, U.S. Army Capt. Joe Claburn visited a house beside an alley from where four guerrillas . . . had attacked a guard tower on a U.S. base. . . . Claburn asked the man if he was willing to signal U.S. troops when insurgents turned up. "I'm telling you sincerely, I cannot cooperate with you," the man replied, shaking his head. "We know you are trying to protect us, but the insurgents would cut off my head. We are too frightened to do anything. They're everywhere. They're probably watching us right now."

-Associated Press, May 8, 2006

The security environment and continuing strength of the insurgency have made it difficult for the United States to transfer security responsibilities to Iraqi forces and progressively draw down U.S. forces. The security situation in Iraq has deteriorated since June 2003, with significant increases in attacks against Iraqi and coalition forces. In addition, the security situation has affected the cost and schedule of rebuilding efforts.

-GAO Report to Congress, February 8, 2006

THE MOST BASIC FUNCTION OF ANY GOVERNMENT is to provide security to its people. That the Iraqi government is currently failing at this task in large areas of the country reduces the Iraqi population's willingness and ability to support the counterinsurgency effort, undermines the government's legitimacy, hinders the political process, and derails reconstruction. It is the single most serious problem in Iraq today. Yet coalition forces have not stepped in to fill the security gap.

Establishing security throughout Iraq has always been a stated goal of the coalition forces, but it has never been their clear priority. Operations against insurgents have consisted mostly of raids and isolated sweeps, apparently divorced from any larger strategic aim. The coalition has never devised a deployment, or planned an operation, aimed at establishing security in the unstable areas of Iraq on a large scale. Coalition strategy has tended to focus instead on minimizing the role of coalition troops in handling the insurgency and pushing indigenous forces into the front of the fight, sometimes even when they were unprepared for such a role. The Bush administration did articulate the strategy of "clear-hold-build" in late 2005, declaring it a "strategy for victory." But U.S. forces have not, on the whole, been ordered or permitted to execute that strategy, and do not currently seem to intend to do so.

One of the reasons for this reluctance is the conviction, reinforced by the first battle of Falluja in early 2004, that coalition forces cannot really perform such missions.

Generals John Abizaid, George Casey, and many others have argued that the mere presence of U.S. forces is an irritant, and their active operations against insurgents alienate more Iraqis than they win over. Yet a number of developments in 2005 should have called this assumption sharply into question.

Coalition forces partnered with Iraqi units were able to put down an uprising in Sadr City, a huge predominantly Shiite district of Baghdad, in early 2005 and then clear out a major insurgent stronghold in Tal Afar in September. In both cases, skillful preparation, the intelligent and discriminate use of force, and attention to vital "nonkinetic" parts of the operation (efforts to change local attitudes by improving water and sewer systems, building schools and clinics, handing out military rations, and so on) led to great and lasting success. These operations seriously undermine the argument that only the Iraqis can successfully prosecute such clear-and-hold missions, though they also show that the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) will not be ready to conduct them on their own for the foreseeable future. In fact, the present course of "muddling through" while attempting to draw down as rapidly as possible is almost certain to prolong the insurgency, and with it the American troop presence in Iraq.

Such a prolongation has always been problematic from a political perspective, but it has become worrisome from a regional perspective as well. The United States has ground and air forces stationed on both the western and eastern borders of Iran at a time of crisis over Iran's nuclear programs. In principle, that presence should give the United States leverage in Tehran; the Iranians clearly feared this in the immediate wake of the invasion of Iraq in 2003. But the oft-repeated American determination to withdraw from Iraq and Afghanistan as rapidly as possible, together with the continuing violent insurgencies in both countries, has turned the tables. The Iranians now derive leverage from America's difficulties on their borders, and may be emboldened to press harder on the nuclear issue than they would otherwise find comfortable.

Common wisdom, especially among senior military leaders, holds that any thought of combining military power with diplomatic, political, economic, and other nonkinetic tools to bring the violence in Iraq rapidly under control is absurd. When pressed on the applicability of the Tal Afar model to problems elsewhere in Iraq, officials of CENTCOM (the central command responsible for U.S. security interests from the Horn of Africa, through the Arabian Gulf region, into Central Asia) dismiss the relevance of that success by pointing to the uniqueness of that town and of the brilliant commander of the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment, which conducted the operation, Colonel H.R. McMaster. They also dismiss as unattainable the troop levels needed to replicate Tal Afar "throughout Iraq." There is no alternative, they declare, to the current strategy.

As a result, the road not taken--a strategy of actually fighting the insurgency to defeat it--has never been examined seriously. But is it really impossible to replicate Tal Afar and Sadr City elsewhere in Iraq? Are the troop requirements (usually placed in the hundreds of thousands) really so large as to make such efforts ridiculous to contemplate? The only way to answer these questions is to think through a battle plan with care. And when appropriate models are applied, the answer that emerges is likely to be: It is indeed possible to imagine a campaign that would bring more rapid success. No individual could devise such a plan alone, and the considerations that follow do not pretend to be a finished blueprint. Rather, they amount to a kind of opening bid, intended to invite a serious examination of the question.

Military operations alone will not solve Iraq's problems. Yet they are essential to maintain political progress, support economic and infrastructure development, and lower intersectarian and interethnic tensions. Iraqi forces must play a central role in any such operations, especially during the process of clearing out insurgents, and they would be the ones to hold and build after the coalition had cleared. Even thinking about such integrated political-economic-military efforts executed jointly by the coalition and the ISF was not possible until about six months ago. The ISF did not have the capability to function even on this basic level, and coalition forces were only beginning to work through the complexities of integrated planning. The experiences of 2005, the rapid growth in the capability of the ISF, and the seating of a permanent Iraqi government now coincide to make possible a strategy for victory such as the president suggested last year. The plan offered here addresses only the military component of what would necessarily be a multifaceted program.

Operational Concept

Two principles would underlie any sound plan for routing the Sunni Arab insurgency: Many operations must occur simultaneously throughout the country, and follow-up operations must be readied.

U.S. forces have shown a marked reluctance to plan large-scale operations in several regions at once. One result has been to allow insurgents to melt away during a single large operation and move to new areas, destabilizing those areas and establishing new safe havens. Simultaneous operations in several of the problem areas would mitigate this effect, driving the insurgents out of the major population centers of the Sunni Arab lands.

It is not possible, however, to conduct such operations in the three river valleys and Baghdad at the same time with the forces available. It would be necessary to develop a campaign plan in two phases, with forces moving from the first operation to the second as rapidly as possible in order to prevent the insurgents from using any pause to regroup.

Each of these two operations would itself be broken down into three phases, as were the successful operations in Tal Afar, Sadr City, and elsewhere. In the first phase, small advance parties would move into the area. They (or U.S. forces already present) would collect intelligence about the local population and the nature of the insurgent threat. They also would begin to shape the situation in their area to prepare for operations. This might include work with local Iraqi troops and police, the building of relationships with local leaders, targeted strikes against known resistance leaders, and other kinetic and nonkinetic operations designed to create favorable conditions for the next phase.

In phase two, reinforcements would surge into the area and conduct large-scale cordon-and-sweep operations. For river valley towns and cities, part of the force would "screen" the population center, establishing observation posts, checkpoints, and other measures to isolate the population, while a joint force of U.S. troops and Iraqis would conduct a house-to-house search for insurgents. In Tal Afar, Iraqi troops were normally the ones interacting directly with the local population, while Americans provided support from armored vehicles and the air.

In phase three, the reinforcements would move out, leaving behind a robust

contingent of Iraqi troops leavened by a substantial U.S. presence. The rule of thumb based on Tal Afar and other successful operations is that the "leave-behind" forces should be at about the ratio of one U.S. battalion for every Iraqi brigade. The American presence helps sustain the ISF, overawe any insurgents who might try to undo the effects of the operation, and restrain the Iraqi soldiers from reprisal attacks or other misbehavior that would undermine the initial successes. Only in this third phase, after basic security has been established, is it possible to recruit into the local police force and begin the transition from military to civilian rule. The first two phases normally last about 90 days each; phase three could last 12 months or more.

One of the factors confusing the discussion of how to proceed in Iraq is a misunderstanding about the nature of the forces required for the counterinsurgency effort there. Many people, including some senior officers, consistently play down the importance of armored and mechanized forces and argue for the primacy of light infantry. In reality, repeated operations have shown that mechanized forces are essential for success. Iraqi insurgents in prepared positions can readily wound or kill soldiers walking or riding in Humvees and trucks. It is far harder for them to destroy Bradleys and tanks, especially when they have no foreknowledge of operations or time to prepare.

In sum, the presence of American armored vehicles provides the sort of overwhelming power that can end firefights rapidly and even deter some insurgents from fighting. The value of armor was demonstrated not only in Tal Afar but even in the less successful operations in Falluja in 2004, where the critical intervention of small numbers of mechanized forces transformed what had been intractable tactical situations. General Chiarelli has argued on several occasions for the centrality of armored vehicles in his operations in Baghdad and Najaf.

Contrary to what one might expect, the presence of armored vehicles can also play an important role in minimizing collateral damage and civilian casualties. When light infantry formations find themselves under coordinated attack by insurgents using RPGs and machine guns, they frequently have no option but to call in heavy artillery support or even precision-guided bombs and missiles dropped from aircraft. Such infantry formations supported by armored vehicles can use the vehicles as shields behind which to advance--or can rely on their extremely accurate main guns to destroy precisely identified targets.

Some soldiers who fought in Sadr City argue that the high-explosive 120mm tank main gun rounds are actually best at minimizing collateral damage, since their blasts normally do not penetrate more than two rooms into a building. Even the machine-gun rounds of the Bradleys carry much farther, to say nothing of 2,000-pound bombs. Chiarelli's soldiers also developed (and have published) numerous techniques for overcoming the various vulnerabilities of armored formations in urban environments, addressing the problems of narrow routes of advance, tanks' inability to hit roof-top targets, and so on. This war cannot be won by armor alone--close interaction with the population and even with the enemy is essential. But to attempt to win it without armor would be to inflict unacceptable levels of collateral damage and further alienate the population.

Iraqi forces do not, on the whole, have armor. They are not capable of planning and conducting large-scale attacks against dug-in and prepared enemies. They are not remotely as proficient as U.S. forces at calling in and adjusting artillery fire and air support. They would find it extraordinarily difficult to take back safe havens such as

Ramadi and Samarra on their own.

No one should expect them to. It is one thing to say that the ISF should be able to handle isolated pockets of insurgents and to maintain order once it has been established. That is a reasonable mission for a nascent military, and one for which many ISF battalions are now prepared. It is quite another thing to demand that a military that has only been in existence for a couple of years undertake large-scale, complex assaults against sophisticated defenses integrating infantry, armor they do not have, and airpower they do not control. Nor is it clear that it is even desirable for the ISF--which the coalition initially intended to be small and limited in its capabilities so that it would pose no threat to its neighbors--to have such capabilities.

A peaceful Iraq does not need a high-end, mixed infantry-armor force capable of conducting complex urban assaults. And U.S. forces will be in Iraq for a very long time indeed if we must wait for the ISF to reach this standard before we can leave. Pursuing the sound strategy laid out by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and General Abizaid of preparing the Iraqis to take care of their own problems, therefore, requires our handling the sorts of counterinsurgency missions for which they are not, and should not have to be, prepared.

This discussion, finally, is focused on military operations not because they alone can win the war, but because too often discussion of the military options has not been grounded in reality. Success in Iraq certainly requires continued commitment to nonkinetic assistance. Such efforts were key both to Chiarelli's success in Sadr City and to McMaster's in Tal Afar. Each clear-and-hold operation must be preceded and followed by intensive efforts to rebuild infrastructure, solidify local political organizations, and restore normal life. By no means all of these efforts are on track. The recent U.S. decision to cut off reconstruction aid not only reduces the prospects for rapid success but is actually a major step backward--a disturbing development at a time when the military has largely figured out how to deliver aid when given the resources. We've come a long way since the first battle of Falluja. Nevertheless, a detailed exploration of these critical enablers is unfortunately beyond the scope of this article.

The Plan

With an additional 7 brigades devoted to active combat operations, it should be possible to conduct clear-hold-build operations in two phases, totaling perhaps 12 to 18 months of significant combat, followed by a longer-term commitment of substantially smaller numbers of "leave-behind" forces. The general concept of the operation is to move from the outside in.

There are two reasons for this approach. First, recently released captured Al Qaeda in Iraq documents reveal that the foreign fighters feel they are losing in Baghdad. They still see Falluja and Ramadi as strongholds that they can use to restore their fortunes, however, highlighting the tight interrelation, in their minds, between the center and the river valleys. Second, because of its size and complexity, Baghdad is the harder problem. It makes sense to attack the more manageable challenges of the river-valley cities and towns, thereby demoralizing the insurgents and making it clear to the resistance in Baghdad that defeat is near. In this way, the coalition can reasonably expect to reduce the difficulty of clearing Baghdad when it turns to that task.

Phase I

The first phase of the operation would clear the three river valleys except for Ramadi. U.S. forces would advance town by town from the upper Euphrates, upper Tigris, and upper Diyala rivers toward Baghdad, clearing and holding as they went and leaving behind a significant ISF presence, leavened with U.S. forces, to consolidate. Because of its size and complexity, Ramadi, in the upper Euphrates valley, would not be cleared during the first phase of the operation, but additional forces would prevent insurgents driven out of the river-valley towns from taking refuge there or in Baghdad. These troops would also serve as a reserve in case of problems in Baghdad or unexpected difficulties in clearing the villages. Coalition forces would start the process of developing intelligence in Ramadi and Baghdad, and shaping the situation there to support coming operations.

This operation should require on the order of 10 U.S. brigades (about 35,000 combat troops) and 18 to 20 Iraqi brigades (90-100,000 ISF troops). The principal cities on the Diyala are Baquba (280,000 inhabitants) and Mukhdadiya (about 150,000). Using the force ratios of the Tal Afar operation, operations in these two cities would require a total of 3 U.S. brigades (10,500 combat troops) and 6 ISF brigades.

The main towns of the upper Tigris are Baiji (120,000), Tikrit (28,000), Samarra (201,000), Taji, and Balad (36,000). Clearing this area would require approximately 3.5 brigades, deployed roughly as follows: one in Baiji, one brigade plus one battalion in Samarra, a battalion in Tikrit, and one in Balad. Taji could be handled either in conjunction with operations in Samarra or by forces based in Baghdad. Coalition forces would be accompanied by about 7 ISF brigades. It appears there are already 2 brigades in this area, one in Taji and one in Samarra, so that it would be necessary to add only 1.5 brigades to conduct the clear-and-hold operations.

The upper Euphrates is long but relatively sparsely settled. The town of al-Qaim on the Syrian border is strategically important, but small; one battalion should suffice to clear it. Another brigade would deploy one battalion north and one south of Haditha to control movement along the river, catch fleeing or regrouping insurgents, and hold the key roads and small villages. Operations in Ramadi, a city of some 420,000 people, would be confined to preventing insurgents from using it as a refuge, gathering intelligence, and preparing for subsequent operations. There are currently about two brigades in and around Ramadi; one more would be needed. And there are about four brigades in Baghdad; one or two more would be deployed to screen Baghdad and to serve as a reserve. It appears that there are now roughly two Marine regiments in Anbar province and one Army brigade in Habbaniya (near Falluja). This force, reinforced by one or two additional brigades, should be sufficient to clear the upper Euphrates apart from Ramadi; with three or four extra brigades, it might even be possible to clear Ramadi at the same time.

Phase II

When clearing operations were completed, the ISF troops that had participated would remain in place to consolidate, supported by about 5 American battalions (2.5 brigades). That would leave about 9 battalions (4.5 brigades), in addition to those already deployed in Iraq, to continue active operations in the second phase: clearing Ramadi and the southern suburbs of Baghdad, and beginning to clear Baghdad itself.

As General Chiarelli's operations in Sadr City show, the forces currently in the capital, reinforced by 2.5 more brigades, should suffice to allow the coalition to clear one neighborhood at a time. If additional forces became available after the clearing of the river valleys, it might be possible to clear two or more neighborhoods simultaneously. Considering that it is highly unlikely that predominantly Shiite Sadr City would rise during operations against Sunni insurgents, that the coalition already controls parts of the city, and that the Sunni insurgents would already have heard of the destruction of their bases in the river valleys, the clearing of Baghdad in this final phase is not a terrifying prospect, even with these relatively small troop numbers. In the worst case, it should be possible to proceed neighborhood by neighborhood over the course of several months. More optimistic scenarios are far more likely.

Most insurgents who shoot at coalition and ISF troops during clearing operations are not hard-core revolutionaries, but the young men of the local tribe who wish to defend their homes and follow the strongest and most successful local leaders. In areas such as Tal Afar before the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment's operation, Ramadi, and Samarra, coalition abandonment led to the rise of local leaders committed to the insurgency, and the young men followed them.

When Tal Afar was evacuated, large U.S. forces arrived, and their operations, both kinetic and nonkinetic, made it clear that the insurgents were about to lose, many insurgent shooters simply went home. Because of the solid ISF presence remaining in Tal Afar backed by U.S. support, they have mostly stayed home--or joined the Iraqi police or the ISF. There is no reason to imagine that operations in other river valley towns would be different, provided that they were conducted intelligently, with careful preparation of the situation prior to combat, and with the discriminate use of force.

Critics of this proposal see it as a plan for reducing every city in Iraq to rubble. They cite the first battle of Falluja. But in that battle, the Marines had none of the advantages U.S. forces can expect in future operations. There, the Marines advanced at short notice, unable to prepare the ground. They had inadequate manpower and armor, and so were forced to overuse artillery and air support to survive. There were virtually no Iraqi soldiers fighting with them. There is no reason to expect their grim experience to be repeated.

Countless examples, moreover, from Tal Afar to the clear-and-hold operations in the upper Euphrates before the December elections, show that there is no reason to imagine that the introduction of American forces into Sunni Arab villages would lead to uncontrollable explosions of rage. On the contrary, when overwhelming force is applied in a discriminate manner, most Iraqis, like most reasonable people, do not leap to fight it.

This plan, finally, is consistent with the idea of a small U.S. "footprint." The difference between 130,000 and 160,000-180,000 American soldiers in Iraq is not the difference between the Americans' being seen as liberators and as occupiers. It does, however, make a great deal of difference in what military operations U.S. forces can contemplate.

The assault on the Sunni Arab insurgency outlined here is but one of many possible variants. One could argue that the political significance of attacks in Baghdad is such that clearing the capital should receive priority, with pacification spreading out from the center along the river valleys. The main counterargument is psychological.

Baghdad would be the hardest job. Tackling it first would probably mean taking on the insurgents at their strongest and most determined. By first clearing their outlying bases and demonstrating their weakening power--by showing the insurgency to be about to fail--the valleys-first strategy would probably prompt many Baghdadi insurgents to choose to go home rather than fight to the death.

Other variants of an offensive strategy might be designed to work with fewer forces, adding another phase, perhaps, by clearing first the Tigris and Diyala and only then approaching the Euphrates, then Baghdad. The details of any plan, of course, would have to be based on the best possible evaluations of the actual situation on the ground.

Accepting Risk

There is certainly risk in undertaking any offensive operations. U.S. commanders and troops less skillful than McMaster and Chiarelli might cause unacceptable collateral damage and alienate local leaders. Unlikely though it seems given their performance to date, Iraqi insurgents might prove more adept than expected at repelling attacks.

But much of the risk is more apparent than real. The troop-requirement estimates used here are based on the highest troop-to-inhabitant ratio of any of the available models--2.5 times higher than the ratios suggested by the RAND study of similar missions, and more than three times higher than General Chiarelli had in Baghdad.

Some might object that the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment was a special unit, since it has its own aviation assets to support its cavalry missions of scouting and screening. Line brigades, it is said, will not be able to perform at the same level. There is no doubt some truth to this assertion, although the techniques the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment used did not rely all that heavily on its special capabilities, and only two of its maneuver squadrons were present in Tal Afar (the third battalion in that operation came from the 82nd Airborne Division).

Mainly, though, the operations in Tal Afar and Sadr City were anything but "near run things." The force that even the relatively small units engaged there could bring to bear, after preparing the environment well, was overwhelming. Even with considerably less technological capability and leadership skill they would have prevailed. The biggest challenge in Tal Afar was figuring out how to design the operation. Now that that has been done, the U.S. Army and Marine Corps do not lack leaders and soldiers able to adapt the successful Tal Afar model to their given circumstances and execute it with competence and proficiency.

Finally, the risks that attend offensive operations must be set against the risks of passivity and reaction. Insurgent strongholds in Ramadi, Samarra, Baghdad, and elsewhere will have to be cleared out. American forces can do it piecemeal, driving the insurgents from stronghold to stronghold, stringing out the violence and prolonging the coalition presence in Iraq. We can wait for Iraqi forces to gain the requisite skills, allowing the insurgency to entrench itself and grow stronger and, again, prolonging the chaos and need for a U.S. commitment. Or we can simply pull out, turning the situation over to ISF troops we know to be unable to deal with the problems they would face, and thereby run the risk of the collapse of the nascent Iraqi state, with all the horrors therein entailed for the people of Iraq and the honor of the United States.

As we consider the alternatives, with the possibility of conflict with Iran ever on the horizon, it would be well to ensure that we are not overlooking the option that would best serve our strategic needs. It may be that the fastest way to turn Iraq over to the Iraqis and draw down American forces is not a steady decline of troop numbers. Instead, the fastest possible "exit strategy" may require one last surge effort to bring the insurgency down to a level that the indigenous forces can handle on their own. Above all, possible strategies must be considered and discarded only on the basis of a realistic assessment. No approach that offers hope of success should be ruled out without careful thought.

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The Security Problem in Iraq

Iraq today presents four military challenges: insurgency among the Sunni Arabs, the growth of Shiite militias, Islamist terrorism conducted by "Al Qaeda in Iraq" and related organizations, and a breakdown of law and order in some areas. American military strategy since the beginning of the insurgency has largely focused on Islamist terrorism. After the February bombing of the al-Askariya mosque in Samarra, however, General John Abizaid testified at a Senate hearing that, as the New York Times put it, "sectarian violence in Iraq was replacing the insurgency as the greatest threat to security and stability." From the beginning of the insurgency, American strategy for handling the Sunni insurrection has centered on helping the Iraqis to defeat the rebels, rather than doing it for them. Coalition efforts to clear out specific trouble areas, such as Falluja, Tal Afar, and the Upper Euphrates river valley have been largely reactions to immediate dangers rather than parts of any strategy for establishing security throughout the country.

Today, the Sunni Arab insurgency is the single most powerful force for disorder and violence in Iraq. Shiite militias, present since the beginning of the occupation, have grown in power in response to the spectacular bombings conducted by Islamist terrorists. Those terrorists, some of them foreigners, rely on the Sunni Arab community for safe havens, supplies, and other necessary assistance. They receive that support primarily because fear and disorder prevail. The breakdown of law and order in parts of the country reflects the difficulty of establishing a robust Iraqi police force in the face of the insurgents' continuous attacks.

There is little the coalition can do to disarm the Shiite militias directly. Attempts to deploy coalition forces in Shiite communities, or to disarm the militias by force, are likely to backfire. The best hope of persuading the Shiite militias to disarm voluntarily lies in removing the threat to their communities that prompted the formation of those militias in the first place.

The coalition has had considerable success in disrupting the Islamist terror networks in Iraq, although it has not captured the senior-most leaders, and it has been unable to prevent those organizations from conducting significant attacks on Shiite holy sites and gatherings. It is not clear that these results have been worth the effort expended upon them. As long as the Sunni Arab community provides safe haven and support (and a small number of recruits) to the Islamist terrorists, military operations aimed at the terrorist networks are unlikely to eliminate the danger from them. The best approach, again, would be to eliminate the violence and disorder

caused by the insurgency, since these are what fuels both active and passive Sunni Arab support for the Islamist terrorists.

The problems with law and order in Iraq are also unlikely to disappear while the insurgency continues. Police forces can be truly effective only if they are locally recruited, and in areas with ongoing insurgent activities, fear of reprisal hinders recruitment and retention. The violence also means that police receive training and equipment more appropriate to light infantry. The development of effective police forces, then, requires the virtual elimination of significant insurgent activity.

For all these reasons, the Sunni Arab insurgency is the crux of the military challenge in Iraq, and the coalition should bend every effort to defeating it.

The Shape of the Sunni Insurgency

One of the most common arguments against directly attacking the Sunni insurgency is that it can't be done. It would require the entire U.S. Army and Marine Corps, some say, to replicate throughout the country the success in Tal Afar. This argument is never presented in any detail, but rests on vague extrapolations of force ratios in Tal Afar to the entire population of Iraq or of Baghdad. In truth, it is quite possible to design a campaign to attack the Sunni insurgency using few more troops than the United States has already had in Iraq.

Extrapolations from the force ratios in Tal Afar to either the country as a whole or the capital are irrelevant. The Sunni Arab insurgency exists in particular regions, dispersed among discrete cities and villages. Baghdad and Mosul, the two large cities wracked by insurgent violence, are ethnically mixed and broken into neighborhoods. Not all neighborhoods are hostile; not all are violent. Nor is the insurgency likely to spread beyond its current limits. Sunni Arab insurgents who venture into the Kurdish-held north are likely to die very quickly. They are unlikely to find a welcome among the Shiite tribes in the south, or in heavily Shiite Sadr City. In 2004 it was possible to imagine some "national front" uniting Sunni Arab and Shiite rebels, but the rise of sectarian violence and the integration of Moktada al-Sadr into the political process dim the prospects for such an occurrence. The challenge today resides primarily, therefore, among 6 million or so Sunni Arabs, not 27 million Iraqis.

Nor are all Sunni areas equally dangerous. Al Anbar is an enormous province, and the task of policing it, along with Nineveh, Salahuddin, and Diyala provinces (and Baghdad), seems a major challenge. The vast majority of the province, however, is open desert, with small, isolated communities. Although the coalition has devoted resources to chasing terrorists around the desert, most of Anbar is nearly irrelevant to the urban insurgency. If the coalition could drive the insurgents out of the cities and towns of the Sunni Triangle and into the deserts of Anbar and Nineveh, the insurgency would rapidly fade to insignificance.

The heart of the insurgency lies, instead, in Baghdad and a handful of cities and towns along three river valleys: the upper Euphrates, stretching from west of Baghdad to the northwest via Ramadi and Haditha to al-Qaim and the Syrian border; the upper Tigris, running north from Baghdad through Taji, Balad, Tikrit, Samarra, and Baiji toward Mosul and the Turkish border; and the Diyala, which extends northeast of Baghdad through Baquba and Mukhdadiya in the direction of Iran. Mosul, Tal Afar, and the other villages and towns in the far north form another nexus of military challenges, although these are mitigated by the mixed population of Mosul

and the stability of the Kurdish areas to the northeast, as well as by the recent joint coalition-ISF success in Tal Afar.

A campaign plan to break the back of the Sunni Arab insurgency should therefore concentrate on four areas: the upper Euphrates, the upper Tigris, the Diyala, and Baghdad. Let us first consider how many troops military planners could reasonably expect to have available to them, and what models are most useful for determining the force-ratios necessary for success.

Available Forces

The basic unit that can conduct sustained independent military operations in the U.S. Army is the brigade combat team; in the Marines, it is the infantry regimental combat team. The Army is in the process of reorganizing itself, so that divisions will consist of four brigades; each brigade will have two maneuver battalions (and many other support units) and will number about 3,500 soldiers all told. The Army aims to have 43 active and 34 reserve brigades. Although by no means all Army units have been converted, the discussion here is based exclusively on the new organizational scheme (and treats Marine regiments as equivalent to Army brigades) for the sake of simplicity.

The current American deployment in Iraq consists of 15 brigades, with one battalion in reserve in Kuwait (another reserve battalion was committed to Iraq in the wake of the Samarra mosque attack in February). These units represent approximately 55,000 of the 130,000 U.S. soldiers and Marines in Iraq. The rest are primarily support units, including military police, trainers working with Iraqi troops and police, and logisticians to support not only coalition combat forces, but the Iraqi Security Forces as well, since Iraqi support systems are not yet fully capable.

The 15 brigades represent the lowest American troop presence in Iraq since the start of the insurgency. At its height, the U.S. deployment reached 20 brigades; for the several months surrounding the elections of late 2005, the United States maintained more than 160,000 soldiers in Iraq. It is worth noting that that level of deployment coincided with a significant reduction in violence and permitted two peaceful elections.

It should be possible to increase the available combat power in Iraq by about 7 brigades in the following manner. U.S. forces are in the middle of another rotation. In the past, CENTCOM has delayed the departure of units to achieve temporary increases in deployed combat forces as new forces arrive. This technique could be used again to generate an additional 6 brigades or so (about 21,000 soldiers--similar to the increase maintained through the election cycle). Committing the rest of the reserve brigade now stationed in Kuwait (and leaving the battalion already called forward into Iraq in country) generates an additional brigade. These 7 brigades (about 24,500 combat troops and a similar number of support troops) would join the 15 brigades already in Iraq, many of which are deployed in or near areas designated for active operations in the plan outlined below.

What, then, could the coalition do with such a force--a total of 77,000 American combat troops--to defeat the insurgency?

Models

Evaluations of the number of troops required to perform particular missions in Iraq must draw on several sources. There are considerable historical data on the force ratios required for success in peacekeeping, stabilization, and counterinsurgency operations, many of them gathered in a 2005 RAND report entitled "Establishing Law and Order After Conflict." This work, using case studies including Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq, concludes that a force ratio of at least one soldier for every 100 inhabitants is required to restore and maintain order in troubled societies. For Iraq as a whole, this would indicate a total coalition commitment of 250,000 troops. For the areas involved in the Sunni Arab insurgency, however, the commitment would range from 60,000 to 100,000 troops. This is the relevant estimate, since it would be unnecessary and unwise to send coalition forces into Kurdistan or most of the Shiite lands.

The recent operations at Tal Afar provide another model for determining the troops required to clear and hold a large, isolated urban center. During that operation, the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment used approximately 3,800 U.S. forces, paired with 5,000 Iraqis, to clear a city of between 150,000 and 200,000 inhabitants (the precise population is impossible to determine because of major shifts before and during combat operations). Using the lower estimate of Tal Afar's population provides a force ratio of one American soldier to every 40 inhabitants.

The 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment achieved success in part by physically isolating Tal Afar (it built a sand-berm all around the city) and evacuating the inhabitants before beginning major combat operations. That technique may not be appropriate in a large city like Baghdad (although it was used with some success in Mosul), but the Sadr City model is available for urban operations. There, Multi-National Division-Baghdad, under the command of Major General Peter Chiarelli, suppressed a large-scale Shiite uprising led by Moktada al-Sadr. At their height, Chiarelli's forces numbered 12 brigades for all of Baghdad--about 40,000 American combat soldiers for a city of some 5.5 million. With a force ratio of about one soldier per 137 inhabitants, he was able to contain and then suppress the uprising in an urban district of some 2.2million people while also controlling the rest of the city.

General Chiarelli relied on different techniques from those Colonel McMaster would use six months later in Tal Afar. He focused heavily on efforts to restore electricity, clean water, sewage functions, and other essential services to the vast and impoverished Sadr City. His troops conducted a different style of military operation as well, infiltrating gradually, block by block, avoiding massive assaults that could have caused significant collateral damage and civilian casualties.

Neither approach is automatically transferable to other cities, villages, or neighborhoods of Baghdad. Sadr City was notoriously lacking in essential services. Emphasizing similar nonkinetic efforts in other parts of the capital might be less effective. Some neighborhoods of Baghdad are easier to isolate than others; the city is divided by two rivers and various causeways. The coalition already controls substantial territory in the capital, including the Green Zone, the airport, and several other large bases. Isolating trouble spots between these areas of control might be possible; isolating large, coherent Sunni neighborhoods might not be.

The key point is that General Chiarelli's and Colonel McMaster's operations, along with the historical studies summarized in the RAND report, provide a solid basis for estimating troop requirements. It is of course always necessary to adjust tactics, techniques, and procedures to suit the particular challenges of any operation.

The Most Dangerous Place

Time

By Michael Ware

5/29

It's another sweltering afternoon in the most dangerous place in Iraq, and the men of Kilo Company, 3rd Battalion, 8th Marines, are looking to pick a fight. First Lieut. Grier Jones splits his 30-odd-man platoon into two squads and sets them loose on the streets of Ramadi. They run block to block, covering one another as they sprint across intersections. Insurgents bob their heads out of homes to catch a glimpse of the Marines--"turkey peeking," as the troops call it--a sign that they are preparing to attack. "We come out here every day, and we get shot at," Jones tells an Iraqi woman who speaks American-accented English. "Where are the bad guys?" She falls silent. Outside, a blue sedan peels away. "Watch that car," a Marine yells, sensing a possible ambush.

His instincts are right. At the next intersection, the Marines duck into a house. Suddenly a machine gun lets rip, spewing bullets around them. "Where's it coming from?" a Marine yells. Immediately, shooting opens up from a second direction. Jones gets his men to the roof to repel the two-sided attack. "Rocket!" screams a grunt, unleashing an AT4 rocket at one of the insurgent positions. Men reel from the blast's concussion. The shooting from the east stops. But as Jones peers over a cement wall to locate the second ambush position, a 7.62-mm round whizzes by. "Whoa, that went right over my head," he says, smiling. As the Marines on the roof fire at the insurgents, Jones orders a squad to push toward the enemy position. Then the enemy weapons go quiet; the insurgents are apparently withdrawing to conserve their energy. Jones radios back to his commanders. "We saw the enemy do a banana peel back, then peel north." He chuckles. "This is every day in Ramadi."

There's no reason to believe that the Americans' battle against Iraqi insurgents is going to get better. With U.S. support for the war sinking, the Bush Administration is eager to show that sufficient progress is being made toward quelling the insurgency to justify a drawdown of the 133,000 troops in Iraq. The U.S. praised the naming of a new Iraqi Cabinet last week, even though it includes some widely mistrusted figures from the previous government. And even as commanders try to turn combat duties over to Iraqi forces and pull U.S. troops back from the front lines, parts of Iraq remain as deadly as ever. At least 18 U.S. troops died last week, raising the total killed since the invasion in March 2003 to 2,456.

Nowhere is the fighting more intense than in Ramadi, the capital of Anbar province and for the moment the seething heart of the Sunni-led insurgency. The city remains a stronghold of insurgents loyal to Abu Mousab al-Zarqawi, the leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq, who U.S. intelligence believes is hiding in an area north of the city. In recent weeks, the soldiers and Marines in Ramadi have come under regular assault, forcing commanders last week to order reinforcements to the besieged city. In the past year, the Army's 2/28th Brigade Combat Team, the unit the Marines are attached to, has lost 79 men in Ramadi--yet the brigade's commander, Colonel John Gronski, says, "The level of violence remains about the same."

TIME spent a week with Kilo Company, the 120-person unit that goes head to head

with the insurgents every day. The goal is to lure al-Qaeda into attacks, which Kilo Company has been doing successfully: in a single week, five men were wounded, three foot patrols were ambushed, and there were unrelenting attacks from small-arms fire and mortars. The experience of the Marines in Ramadi illuminates some of the shortcomings of the U.S. strategy for defeating the insurgency. The commander has only one brigade to secure the town, even though U.S. officers say privately that at least three are needed. Among the troops, frustration is growing: many officers say that the U.S. is too lenient in its dealings with the enemy, allowing too many captured insurgents to go free, and that soldiers can do little more than act as international police. Others claim that superiors are overlooking their reports about conditions on the ground. If the U.S. and its Iraqi allies are making progress in eroding the appeal of the resistance, the men in Ramadi don't see it. Says an American officer: "This s___ ain't going anywhere."

From the instant Kilo Company set foot in Ramadi, the Marines knew they were in the middle of an insurgent hotbed. Lance Corporal Jose (Syco) Tasayco was on the unit's earliest patrol outside the wire in March. "The first day was an eye opener. We got contact, that first patrol. It was like, wow, we couldn't believe it, but we got outta there good. Nobody got hit," he says. The Marines are based in the battle-scarred Government Center in the middle of Ramadi, a magnet for al-Qaeda attacks--one of the few ways the Marines can find their enemy. The precarious outpost also protects the nascent local government, which operates out of its confines.

Sitting sentry in the center of town, the Marines are a ripe target for insurgent assaults. On April 24, mortars begin crashing down on the compound, and the shuddering impacts force the grunts to take cover in their rooftop bunkers. From an alley in the northeast, an insurgent fires a rocket-propelled grenade that slams a wall along the narrow mouth of a sandbagged gun pit. Shards of hot metal penetrate the opening, hitting Corporal Jonathan Wilson. Blood pours down his neck. "Corpsman up, corpsman up," he cries--asking for a medic to head to the roof. He runs downstairs and collapses into the arms of a sergeant.

Meanwhile, shrapnel has shredded the left thumb of Lance Corporal Adam Sardinas. But he keeps his finger on the trigger of a grenade launcher, and it's not until another Marine arrives to relieve him that he finally turns for the slit doorway. "Let me get outta here," he says. "I'm hit pretty bad." But the battle goes on: below the Marines' outpost, al-Qaeda fighters toting AK-47s dart in and out of view. As blood from Sardinas and Wilson pools at his feet, Sergeant William Morrow grips the grenade launcher. A fellow Marine spots an insurgent in the open. "Waste his ass," Tasayco urges as they open fire on the enemy below.

Despite heavy losses among the insurgents--112 were killed in one week in April--they have proved resistant to the U.S.'s onslaughts. Intelligence officials increasingly refer to them as a "legitimate local resistance," but it's al-Qaeda that drives them. Long ago, al-Zarqawi's network settled in Ramadi and, in essence, hijacked the homegrown fight. Although Iraqi groups have bucked al-Zarqawi's authority periodically--most notably in last year's referendum and December election, when they opted to vote, forcing him to stand idly by--al-Qaeda maintains its grip.

U.S. efforts to woo Iraqi groups were beginning to pay dividends, as the city's tribal and insurgent leaders gave their approval for young Sunnis to join the new police force. Recruitment mostly ran at about 40 a month, though in January, 1,000 showed up to join. But al-Qaeda responded by sending a chest-vest suicide bomber

into the queue of applicants, killing about 40 Iraqis, wounding 80, and killing two Americans. When the recruits returned days later, al-Zarqawi followed up with a wave of seven assassinations of tribal sheiks. "That hurt us a lot," says Gronski.

Given the ability of al-Zarqawi's men to melt into the city, Kilo Company has few options but to search for the insurgents on block-by-block foot patrols through the worst areas. It's perilous work. On one morning this month, Tasayco and Corporal Nathan Buck take their squad out to commandeer a small shopping complex, which will give cover for the rest of the platoon to push east. On the roof, Buck, his helmet emblazoned with the words DEATH DEALERS in thick letters, warns his Marines to stay alert. When Tasayco sees movement in a nearby window, Buck rises to check it out. An insurgent sniper fires at his head, cracking a round into the lip of the cement wall in front of him. "I should be dead right now," Buck says to Tasayco with a laugh.

It's not long before another round flies over their heads, this time from a little farther to the east. The sniper is moving, hunting them. Minutes pass with no more firing. But Tasayco is uneasy. The order comes over the radio to move back to base. "Be careful, we're gonna get hit," a Marine says as the men drop to the pavement. It's only 150 yards back to the Government Center, but every inch is hard won. Lance Corporal Phillip Tussey pauses on the edge of a small alley. With another Marine covering him, he makes a dash to cross the five yards of open ground. He doesn't get more than a couple of steps when a shot rings out. He's cut down mid-stride, hit in the thigh. The men around him open fire. Within seconds, insurgents start shooting from the opposite direction. A Marine tries to drag Tussey by a leg toward a humvee but gets stranded out in the open. Tasayco bolts forward and grabs the wounded man by the arm. Someone else joins him. Still firing, they shove him into the vehicle. Tasayco takes cover and looks for the shooter. "Where the hell is this guy at?" he hollers. No one answers. "C'mon, everybody, let's go. Pick it up. Get the f___ out of here, man," Tasayco shouts. All his men can do is run.

So why does Ramadi remain beyond the U.S.'s control? Part of the problem, many officers say, is that the troops' authority to act is constrained by politics. Soldiers cannot lock up suspected insurgents without first getting an arrest warrant and a sworn statement from two witnesses. And those who are convicted often receive jail sentences that are shorter than a grunt's tour of Iraq. "We keep seeing guys we arrested coming back out, and things get worse again," says an intelligence officer.

The bigger problem, though, is one that few in the military command want to hear: there aren't enough troops to do the job. "There's a realization, as every military commander knows, that you cannot be strong everywhere," says Gronski of Ramadi. "In the outlying areas, we think in terms of an economy of force where we are willing to accept risk by not placing as many troops." But while Gronski says his fighting strength is "appropriate," other commanders bristle at the limitations. "I can't believe it each time the Secretary of Defense talks about reducing force," says a senior U.S. officer. War planners in Iraq say just getting a handle on Ramadi demands three times as many soldiers as are there now. Several U.S. commanders say they won't ask superiors for more troops or plan large-scale operations because doing so would expose problems in the U.S.'s strategy that no one wants to acknowledge. "It's what I call the Big Lie," a high-ranking U.S. commander told TIME.

To be fair, gains are being made in Ramadi with the Iraqi army, the police and the young provincial government. A brigade intelligence officer says that "we are not

getting excited because this is a long process--though we are winning. The tide is turning." But for those in the midst of the battle, that can sometimes be hard to see. "No matter what they say about the rest of the country, it ain't like this place," says a battalion officer in the thick of the fight. "It's the worst place in the world."

Commanders won't ask for more troops out of fear of exposing problems no one wants to acknowledge.

Streetwise

National Review

By Ali Al-Zahid

5/30

Baghdad--After seemingly never-ending disputes, Iraqi leaders finally reached an agreement on a new government. In itself, this agreement involving the two main ethnic groups and two chief religious factions is a reason to celebrate; but Iraq still faces a long, obstacle-filled road to democracy and unity. The task is not, as is often wrongly said, reconstruction; you can't reconstruct what never existed. What Iraq has to do is start from scratch, after millions of deaths and a society destroyed by 35 years of Baath dictatorship.

The Iraqi people now have two options. One is the so-called Zarqawi or Baath option, which would mean years of civil war, with millions of victims, culminating in the division of Iraq into a northern Iraq governed by the two big Kurdish parties and a remaining territory governed either by Sunni or Shiite leaders.

The other option is to continue on the current road--a path that will require much effort and patience, and will entail many casualties. This option has one major problem: The political figures who are now running Iraq are no longer trusted. Too much has gone wrong, and yet the political leaders still ignore the danger they are in of losing the "Iraqi street"--the poor and uneducated people in the slums of Baghdad and Basra. The group around Moqtada al-Sadr is addressing these people, using the old and efficient Hamas principle: take care of the people's basic needs, and indoctrinate them.

Here's just one example, which I personally witnessed a short time ago. It was a meeting between project managers who were working on the infrastructure of Sadr City, a slum of Baghdad, and representatives of Moqtada. The meeting was simply about the question of where and when to begin the construction works in this Moqtada stronghold. The Moqtada people confronted the managers with some absurd requirements; a second meeting was scheduled, but again with no result; to a third meeting, the Moqtada men came bearing arms. The message was clear: Either their conditions would be accepted, or the project managers would be killed.

The road to a new future will only work if the "street" is re-conquered. The street was won over once before--on April 9, 2003, when Coalition forces reached Baghdad. But then they were lost, through corruption, the Abu Ghraib scandal, and the failure to rebuild Iraq successfully. We have to understand that these people are the key to the success of Project Iraq. If we win this group over, Moqtada will have no support. Perhaps it is thought that Moqtada can be controlled, but this is a great mistake. Moqtada's forces stay calm only because they are growing every day, biding their

time before wreaking havoc on the country. In Iraq's history, too many Shiites have been victimized for the Shiite community to be easily split: Once the group around Moqtada reaches critical mass, the solidarity between them and the rest of the Shiites will be virtually insuperable. It is therefore urgent that we take back the street--as soon as possible.

This is only one of the many problems facing Iraq. But this path, difficult as it may be, is the only one that can take us to the functioning Iraq we all dream of. We Iraqis have to understand that the only solution is to stand together. We are surrounded by enemies, and on the day we fail with our nation-building there will, once again, be millions of dead. Some believe that civil war is inevitable, and has to take place in order to achieve unity; but the fact is we have already paid with enough lives, we have already buried too many friends and relatives.

Al Qaeda and the supporters of Saddam Hussein have, since 2003, tried everything imaginable to start this civil war--but they have tried in vain. There are still a large number of people who won't be provoked, but with every terrorist attack, with every assassination, the danger increases.

There is no prior instance in history in which there were such vehement efforts made, without success, to incite two ethnic groups to civil war. We Iraqis can say with pride that that, so far, there is no civil war to speak of--even if the world calls the current state of affairs a civil war, and waits expectantly for a real one to break out.

-- Ali Al-Zahid is a member of the new Iraquna think tank. Under Saddam Hussein, he was imprisoned after his father made critical statements against the Baath regime.

The Real Iraq

Commentary

By Amir Taheri

June 2006

Spending time in the United States after a tour of Iraq can be a disorienting experience these days. Within hours of arriving here, as I can attest from a recent visit, one is confronted with an image of Iraq that is unrecognizable. It is created in several overlapping ways: through television footage showing the charred remains of vehicles used in suicide attacks, surrounded by wailing women in black and grim-looking men carrying coffins; by armchair strategists and political gurus predicting further doom or pontificating about how the war should have been fought in the first place; by authors of instant-history books making their rounds to dissect the various "fundamental mistakes" committed by the Bush administration; and by reporters, cocooned in hotels in Baghdad, explaining the "carnage" and "chaos" in the streets as signs of the country's "impending" or "undeclared" civil war. Add to all this the day's alleged scandal or revelation—an outed CIA operative, a reportedly doctored intelligence report, a leaked pessimistic assessment—and it is no wonder the American public registers disillusion with Iraq and everyone who embroiled the U.S. in its troubles.

It would be hard indeed for the average interested citizen to find out on his own just how grossly this image distorts the realities of present-day Iraq. Part of the problem, faced by even the most well-meaning news organizations, is the difficulty of covering so large and complex a subject; naturally, in such circumstances, sensational items rise to the top. But even ostensibly more objective efforts, like the Brookings Institution's much-cited Iraq Index with its constantly updated array of security, economic, and public-opinion indicators, tell us little about the actual feel of the country on the ground.

To make matters worse, many of the newsmen, pundits, and commentators on whom American viewers and readers rely to describe the situation have been contaminated by the increasing bitterness of American politics. Clearly there are those in the media and the think tanks who wish the Iraq enterprise to end in tragedy, as a just comeuppance for George W. Bush. Others, prompted by noble sentiment, so abhor the idea of war that they would banish it from human discourse before admitting that, in some circumstances, military power can be used in support of a good cause. But whatever the reason, the half-truths and outright misinformation that now function as conventional wisdom have gravely disserved the American people.

For someone like myself who has spent considerable time in Iraq—a country I first visited in 1968—current reality there is, nevertheless, very different from this conventional wisdom, and so are the prospects for Iraq's future. It helps to know where to look, what sources to trust, and how to evaluate the present moment against the background of Iraqi and Middle Eastern history.

Since my first encounter with Iraq almost 40 years ago, I have relied on several broad measures of social and economic health to assess the country's condition. Through good times and bad, these signs have proved remarkably accurate—as accurate, that is, as is possible in human affairs. For some time now, all have been pointing in an unequivocally positive direction.

The first sign is refugees. When things have been truly desperate in Iraq—in 1959, 1969, 1971, 1973, 1980, 1988, and 1990—long queues of Iraqis have formed at the Turkish and Iranian frontiers, hoping to escape. In 1973, for example, when Saddam Hussein decided to expel all those whose ancestors had not been Ottoman citizens before Iraq's creation as a state, some 1.2 million Iraqis left their homes in the space of just six weeks. This was not the temporary exile of a small group of middle-class professionals and intellectuals, which is a common enough phenomenon in most Arab countries. Rather, it was a departure en masse, affecting people both in small villages and in big cities, and it was a scene regularly repeated under Saddam Hussein.

Since the toppling of Saddam in 2003, this is one highly damaging image we have not seen on our television sets—and we can be sure that we would be seeing it if it were there to be shown. To the contrary, Iraqis, far from fleeing, have been returning home. By the end of 2005, in the most conservative estimate, the number of returnees topped the 1.2-million mark. Many of the camps set up for fleeing Iraqis in Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia since 1959 have now closed down. The oldest such center, at Ashrafiyah in southwest Iran, was formally shut when its last Iraqi guests returned home in 2004.

A second dependable sign likewise concerns human movement, but of a different kind. This is the flow of religious pilgrims to the Shiite shrines in Karbala and Najaf. Whenever things start to go badly in Iraq, this stream is reduced to a trickle and then it dries up completely. From 1991 (when Saddam Hussein massacred Shiites involved in a revolt against him) to 2003, there were scarcely any pilgrims to these cities. Since Saddam's fall, they have been flooded with visitors. In 2005, the holy sites received an estimated 12 million pilgrims, making them the most visited spots in the entire Muslim world, ahead of both Mecca and Medina.

Over 3,000 Iraqi clerics have also returned from exile, and Shiite seminaries, which just a few years ago held no more than a few dozen pupils, now boast over 15,000 from 40 different countries. This is because Najaf, the oldest center of Shiite scholarship, is once again able to offer an alternative to Qom, the Iranian "holy city" where a radical and highly politicized version of Shiism is taught. Those wishing to pursue the study of more traditional and quietist forms of Shiism now go to Iraq where, unlike in Iran, the seminaries are not controlled by the government and its secret police.

A third sign, this one of the hard economic variety, is the value of the Iraqi dinar, especially as compared with the region's other major currencies. In the final years of Saddam Hussein's rule, the Iraqi dinar was in free fall; after 1995, it was no longer even traded in Iran and Kuwait. By contrast, the new dinar, introduced early in 2004, is doing well against both the Kuwaiti dinar and the Iranian rial, having risen by 17 percent against the former and by 23 percent against the latter. Although it is still impossible to fix its value against a basket of international currencies, the new Iraqi dinar has done well against the U.S. dollar, increasing in value by almost 18 percent between August 2004 and August 2005. The overwhelming majority of Iraqis, and millions of Iranians and Kuwaitis, now treat it as a safe and solid medium of exchange

My fourth time-tested sign is the level of activity by small and medium-sized businesses. In the past, whenever things have gone downhill in Iraq, large numbers of such enterprises have simply closed down, with the country's most capable entrepreneurs decamping to Jordan, Syria, Saudi Arabia, the Persian Gulf states, Turkey, Iran, and even Europe and North America. Since liberation, however, Iraq has witnessed a private-sector boom, especially among small and medium-sized businesses.

According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, as well as numerous private studies, the Iraqi economy has been doing better than any other in the region. The country's gross domestic product rose to almost \$90 billion in 2004 (the latest year for which figures are available), more than double the output for 2003, and its real growth rate, as estimated by the IMF, was 52.3 per cent. In that same period, exports increased by more than \$3 billion, while the inflation rate fell to 25.4 percent, down from 70 percent in 2002. The unemployment rate was halved, from 60 percent to 30 percent.

Related to this is the level of agricultural activity. Between 1991 and 2003, the country's farm sector experienced unprecedented decline, in the end leaving almost the entire nation dependent on rations distributed by the United Nations under Oil-for-Food. In the past two years, by contrast, Iraqi agriculture has undergone an equally unprecedented revival. Iraq now exports foodstuffs to neighboring countries, something that has not happened since the 1950's. Much of the upturn is due to

smallholders who, shaking off the collectivist system imposed by the Baathists, have retaken control of land that was confiscated decades ago by the state.

Finally, one of the surest indices of the health of Iraqi society has always been its readiness to talk to the outside world. Iraqis are a verbalizing people; when they fall silent, life is incontrovertibly becoming hard for them. There have been times, indeed, when one could find scarcely a single Iraqi, whether in Iraq or abroad, prepared to express an opinion on anything remotely political. This is what Kanan Makiya meant when he described Saddam Hussein's regime as a "republic of fear." Today, again by way of dramatic contrast, Iraqis are voluble to a fault. Talk radio, television talk-shows, and Internet blogs are all the rage, while heated debate is the order of the day in shops, tea-houses, bazaars, mosques, offices, and private homes. A "catharsis" is how Luay Abdulillah, the Iraqi short-story writer and diarist, describes it. "This is one way of taking revenge against decades of deadly silence." Moreover, a vast network of independent media has emerged in Iraq, including over 100 privately-owned newspapers and magazines and more than two dozen radio and television stations. To anyone familiar with the state of the media in the Arab world, it is a truism that Iraq today is the place where freedom of expression is most effectively exercised.

That an experienced observer of Iraq with a sense of history can point to so many positive factors in the country's present condition will not do much, of course, to sway the more determined critics of the U.S. intervention there. They might even agree that the images fed to the American public show only part of the picture, and that the news from Iraq is not uniformly bad. But the root of their opposition runs deeper, to political fundamentals.

Their critique can be summarized in the aphorism that "democracy cannot be imposed by force." It is a view that can be found among the more sophisticated elements on the Left and, increasingly, among dissenters on the Right, from Senator Chuck Hagel of Nebraska to the ex-neoconservative Francis Fukuyama. As Senator Hagel puts it, "You cannot in my opinion just impose a democratic form of government on a country with no history and no culture and no tradition of democracy."

I would tend to agree. But is Iraq such a place? In point of fact, before the 1958 pro-Soviet military coup d'état that established a leftist dictatorship, Iraq did have its modest but nevertheless significant share of democratic history, culture, and tradition. The country came into being through a popular referendum held in 1921. A constitutional monarchy modeled on the United Kingdom, it had a bicameral parliament, several political parties (including the Baath and the Communists), and periodic elections that led to changes of policy and government. At the time, Iraq also enjoyed the freest press in the Arab world, plus the widest space for debate and dissent in the Muslim Middle East.

To be sure, Baghdad in those days was no Westminster, and, as the 1958 coup proved, Iraqi democracy was fragile. But every serious student of contemporary Iraq knows that substantial segments of the population, from all ethnic and religious communities, had more than a taste of the modern world's democratic aspirations. As evidence, one need only consult the immense literary and artistic production of Iraqis both before and after the 1958 coup. Under successor dictatorial regimes, it is true, the conviction took hold that democratic principles had no future in Iraq—a conviction that was responsible in large part for driving almost five million Iraqis, a

quarter of the population, into exile between 1958 and 2003, just as the opposite conviction is attracting so many of them and their children back to Iraq today. A related argument used to condemn Iraq's democratic prospects is that it is an "artificial" country, one that can be held together only by a dictator. But did any nation-state fall from the heavens wholly made? All are to some extent artificial creations, and the U.S. is preeminently so. The truth is that Iraq—one of the 53 founding countries of the United Nations—is older than a majority of that organization's current 198 member states. Within the Arab League, and setting aside Oman and Yemen, none of the 22 members is older. Two-thirds of the 122 countries regarded as democracies by Freedom House came into being after Iraq's appearance on the map.

Critics of the democratic project in Iraq also claim that, because it is a multi-ethnic and multi-confessional state, the country is doomed to despotism, civil war, or disintegration. But the same could be said of virtually all Middle Eastern states, most of which are neither multi-ethnic nor multi-confessional. More important, all Iraqis, regardless of their ethnic, linguistic, and sectarian differences, share a sense of national identity—*uruqa* ("Iraqi-ness")—that has developed over the past eight decades. A unified, federal state may still come to grief in Iraq—history is not written in advance—but even should a divorce become inevitable at some point, a democratic Iraq would be in a better position to manage it.

What all of this demonstrates is that, contrary to received opinion, Operation Iraqi Freedom was not an attempt to impose democracy by force. Rather, it was an effort to use force to remove impediments to democratization, primarily by deposing a tyrant who had utterly suppressed a well-established aspect of the country's identity. It may take years before we know for certain whether or not post-liberation Iraq has definitely chosen democracy. But one thing is certain: without the use of force to remove the Baathist regime, the people of Iraq would not have had the opportunity even to contemplate a democratic future.

Assessing the progress of that democratic project is no simple matter. But, by any reasonable standard, Iraqis have made extraordinary strides. In a series of municipal polls and two general elections in the past three years, up to 70 percent of eligible Iraqis have voted. This new orientation is supported by more than 60 political parties and organizations, the first genuinely free-trade unions in the Arab world, a growing number of professional associations acting independently of the state, and more than 400 nongovernmental organizations representing diverse segments of civil society. A new constitution, written by Iraqis representing the full spectrum of political, ethnic, and religious sensibilities was overwhelmingly approved by the electorate in a referendum last October.

Iraq's new democratic reality is also reflected in the vocabulary of politics used at every level of society. Many new words—accountability, transparency, pluralism, dissent—have entered political discourse in Iraq for the first time. More remarkably, perhaps, all parties and personalities currently engaged in the democratic process have committed themselves to the principle that power should be sought, won, and lost only through free and fair elections.

These democratic achievements are especially impressive when set side by side with the declared aims of the enemies of the new Iraq, who have put up a determined fight against it. Since the country's liberation, the jihadists and residual Baathists have killed an estimated 23,000 Iraqis, mostly civilians, in scores of random attacks

and suicide operations. Indirectly, they have caused the death of thousands more, by sabotaging water and electricity services and by provoking sectarian revenge attacks.

But they have failed to translate their talent for mayhem and murder into political success. Their campaign has not succeeded in appreciably slowing down, let alone stopping, the country's democratization. Indeed, at each step along the way, the jihadists and Baathists have seen their self-declared objectives thwarted.

After the invasion, they tried at first to prevent the formation of a Governing Council, the expression of Iraq's continued existence as a sovereign nation-state. They managed to murder several members of the council, including its president in 2003, but failed to prevent its formation or to keep it from performing its task in the interim period. The next aim of the insurgents was to stop municipal elections. Their message was simple: candidates and voters would be killed. But, once again, they failed: thousands of men and women came forward as candidates and more than 1.5 million Iraqis voted in the localities where elections were held.

The insurgency made similar threats in the lead-up to the first general election, and the result was the same. Despite killing 36 candidates and 148 voters, they failed to derail the balloting, in which the number of voters rose to more than 8 million. Nor could the insurgency prevent the writing of the new democratic constitution, despite a campaign of assassination against its drafters. The text was ready in time and was submitted to and approved by a referendum, exactly as planned. The number of voters rose yet again, to more than 9 million.

What of relations among the Shiites, Sunnis, and Kurds—the focus of so much attention of late? For almost three years, the insurgency worked hard to keep the Arab Sunni community, which accounts for some 15 percent of the population, out of the political process. But that campaign collapsed when millions of Sunnis turned out to vote in the constitutional referendum and in the second general election, which saw almost 11 million Iraqis go to the polls. As I write, all political parties representing the Arab Sunni minority have joined the political process and have strong representation in the new parliament. With the convening of that parliament, and the nomination in April of a new prime minister and a three-man presidential council, the way is open for the formation of a broad-based government of national unity to lead Iraq over the next four years.

As for the insurgency's effort to foment sectarian violence—a strategy first launched in earnest toward the end of 2005—this too has run aground. The hope here was to provoke a full-scale war between the Arab Sunni minority and the Arab Shiites who account for some 60 percent of the population. The new strategy, like the ones previously tried, has certainly produced many deaths. But despite countless cases of sectarian killings by so-called militias, there is still no sign that the Shiites as a whole will acquiesce in the role assigned them by the insurgency and organize a concerted campaign of nationwide retaliation.

Finally, despite the impression created by relentlessly dire reporting in the West, the insurgency has proved unable to shut down essential government services. Hundreds of teachers and schoolchildren have been killed in incidents including the beheading of two teachers in their classrooms this April and horrific suicide attacks against school buses. But by September 2004, most schools across Iraq and virtually all universities were open and functioning. By September 2005, more than 8.5 million

Iraqi children and young people were attending school or university—an all-time record in the nation's history.

A similar story applies to Iraq's clinics and hospitals. Between October 2003 and January 2006, more than 80 medical doctors and over 400 nurses and medical auxiliaries were murdered by the insurgents. The jihadists also raided several hospitals, killing ordinary patients in their beds. But, once again, they failed in their objectives. By January 2006, all of Iraq's 600 state-owned hospitals and clinics were in full operation, along with dozens of new ones set up by the private sector since liberation.

Another of the insurgency's strategic goals was to bring the Iraqi oil industry to a halt and to disrupt the export of crude. Since July 2003, Iraq's oil infrastructure has been the target of more than 3,000 attacks and attempts at sabotage. But once more the insurgency has failed to achieve its goals. Iraq has resumed its membership in the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and has returned to world markets as a major oil exporter. According to projections, by the end of 2006 it will be producing its full OPEC quota of 2.8 million barrels a day. The Baathist remnant and its jihadist allies resemble a gambler who wins a heap of chips at a roulette table only to discover that he cannot exchange them for real money at the front desk. The enemies of the new Iraq have succeeded in ruining the lives of tens of thousands of Iraqis, but over the past three years they have advanced their overarching goals, such as they are, very little. Instead, they have been militarily contained and politically defeated again and again, and the beneficiary has been Iraqi democracy.

None of this means that the new Iraq is out of the woods. Far from it. Democratic success still requires a great deal of patience, determination, and luck. The U.S.-led coalition, its allies, and partners have achieved most of their major political objectives, but that achievement remains under threat and could be endangered if the U.S., for whatever reason, should decide to snatch a defeat from the jaws of victory.

The current mandate of the U.S.-led coalition runs out at the end of this year, and it is unlikely that Washington and its allies will want to maintain their military presence at current levels. In the past few months, more than half of the 103 bases used by the coalition have been transferred to the new Iraqi army. The best guess is that the number of U.S. and coalition troops could be cut from 140,000 to 25,000 or 30,000 by the end of 2007.

One might wonder why, if the military mission has been so successful, the U.S. still needs to maintain a military presence in Iraq for at least another two years. There are three reasons for this.

The first is to discourage Iraq's predatory neighbors, notably Iran and Syria, which might wish to pursue their own agendas against the new government in Baghdad. Iran has already revived some claims under the Treaties of Erzerum (1846), according to which Tehran would enjoy a *droit de regard* over Shiite shrines in Iraq. In Syria, some in that country's ruling circles have invoked the possibility of annexing the area known as Jazirah, the so-called Sunni triangle, in the name of Arab unity. For its part, Turkey is making noises about the Treaty of Lausanne (1923), which gave it a claim to the oilfields of northern Iraq. All of these pretensions need to be rebuffed.

The second reason for extending America's military presence is political. The U.S. is acting as an arbiter among Iraq's various ethnic and religious communities and political factions. It is, in a sense, a traffic cop, giving Iraqis a green or red light when and if needed. It is important that the U.S. continue performing this role for the first year or two of the newly elected parliament and government.

Finally, the U.S. and its allies have a key role to play in training and testing Iraq's new army and police. Impressive success has already been achieved in that field. Nevertheless, the new Iraqi army needs at least another year or two before it will have developed adequate logistical capacities and learned to organize and conduct operations involving its various branches.

But will the U.S. stay the course? Many are betting against it. The Baathists and jihadists, their prior efforts to derail Iraqi democracy having come to naught, have now pinned their hopes on creating enough chaos and death to persuade Washington of the futility of its endeavors. In this, they have the tacit support not only of local Arab and Muslim despots rightly fearful of the democratic genie but of all those in the West whose own incessant theme has been the certainty of American failure. Among Bush-haters in the U.S., just as among anti-Americans around the world, predictions of civil war in Iraq, of spreading regional hostilities, and of a revived global terrorism are not about to cease any time soon.

But more sober observers should understand the real balance sheet in Iraq. Democracy is succeeding. Moreover, thanks to its success in Iraq, there are stirrings elsewhere in the region. Beyond the much-publicized electoral concessions wrung from authoritarian rulers in Egypt and Saudi Arabia, there is a new democratic discourse to be heard. Nationalism and pan-Arabism, yesterday's hollow rallying cries, have given way to a "big idea" of a very different kind. Debate and dissent are in the air where there was none before—a development owing, in significant measure, to the U.S. campaign in Iraq and the brilliant if still checkered Iraqi response.

The stakes, in short, could not be higher. This is all the more reason to celebrate, to build on, and to consolidate what has already been accomplished. Instead of railing against the Bush administration, America's elites would do better, and incidentally display greater self-respect, to direct their wrath where it properly belongs: at those violent and unrestrained enemies of democracy in Iraq who are, in truth, the enemies of democracy in America as well, and of everything America has ever stood for.

Is Iraq a quagmire, a disaster, a failure? Certainly not; none of the above. Of all the adjectives used by skeptics and critics to describe today's Iraq, the only one that has a ring of truth is "messy." Yes, the situation in Iraq today is messy. Births always are. Since when is that a reason to declare a baby unworthy of life?

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Hell & Haditha

National Review

By W. Thomas Smith Jr.

6/2

Nothing in the human experience is more physically exhausting, mentally challenging, and emotionally rattling than ground combat, particularly that which is fought in tooth-to-eyeball proximity to the enemy. It does things to soldiers that people who have never experienced it will never truly comprehend.

"Everyone in ground combat is in a constant state of exhaustion, sleep deprivation, high strung emotions and nervous tension. All are anticipating the next action," says retired U.S. Marine Col. John W. Ripley.

He should know: As the legendary leatherneck who almost single-handedly blunted the North Vietnamese Army's Easter Offensive in 1972 by blowing up the Dong-Ha bridge while under heavy enemy fire, Ripley would testify 20 years later before a Presidential Commission on the very subject of ground combat. He described it as an "overt, aggressive, purposely violent act where violence has an advantageous role."

In a conversation earlier this week, Ripley told me, "Marines are always alert and prepared to react in combat. The responsibility then falls to the leader to prevent them from overreacting, and often it is not easy."

For those tasked with engaging the enemy in violent ground combat, the potential for overreaction is a variable that simply never goes away.

What Happened in Haditha? Which brings us to the remote town of Haditha, in Iraq's notorious Al Anbar Province. There on November 19, 2005, a handful of U.S. Marines allegedly killed some two-dozen Iraqi civilians, some said to be women and children.

Though the facts are not yet known, the killings are alleged to be the result of an emotionally charged retaliation for the ambush killing of Marine Lance Corporal Miguel Terrazas, who was driving a Humvee on patrol when the vehicle was struck by an improvised explosive device (IED).

According to preliminary reports, after Terrazas was killed, his fellow Marines raided two or three houses suspected of harboring insurgents. There was shooting, and people died.

Today, it seems most anyone on either side of the political fence--whether supportive of our efforts in Iraq or not--would agree that someone is probably going to be charged. Whether or not they will be convicted, and of what, is another matter entirely.

Now, I'm not excusing what may--with "may" being the optimum word here--prove to be a shameful day in the history of our Marine Corps. But it benefits no one if we do not attempt to understand the men involved and the dynamics of the system, and how it all could have temporarily broken down, if it did. Nor is there any justifiable reason to publicly convict the Marines--as we have seen in the rhetoric of Congressman John Murtha (D., Penn)--before those Marines have had their day in court.

Murtha contends the Marines killed civilians in "cold blood." But based on my understanding of killing in "cold blood"--which is "deliberate" and with "a complete lack of emotion"--that would have been impossible under the circumstances. And any former Marine like Murtha should know better.

Of course we will not know the specifics of what happened until all of the investigations and hearings have been completed. Even then, we may not know everything, much of it having been lost in the proverbial fog of war and the so-often under-appreciated reality of combat and combat stress.

Guilty or not, what these young riflemen go through day-in and day-out must be considered if we are to fully understand what went so terribly wrong at Haditha and why.

A Typical Attack Let's consider a frequent and typical attack on a Marine or Army patrol as an example: When a Humvee is hit by a mine or an IED, the result is nothing like what one might see in a movie. It's not simply a blast and people are dead. No chest-clutching John Wayne departures with inspirational music. There is no glory. No adventure. It's just the worst sort of human drama imaginable.

The vehicle, if close enough to the blast, flips into the air, snapping necks and spinal cords. Heads and limbs are torn from bodies. Gasoline ignites and ammunition cooks off, burning any survivors to a crisp.

Those soldiers and Marines (many of whom are still teenagers) who witness the action are instantly shocked, physically sickened, grief-stricken, and enraged over the horror of having watched buddies--who have become closer than any sibling might ever hope to be--torn to pieces. Badly wounded buddies are screaming in agony. Yet the ones uninjured or with minor injuries have to respond as trained. They are dismounting from vehicles, simultaneously removing safeties from weapons and racing for cover or assaulting in the direction of the ambush where seen or unseen forces are shooting at them. The counterattack often requires the instant establishment of a base of fire by one group while an enveloping force prepares to overwhelm the enemy. Blood-pressure is peaking. Adrenaline is pumping.

Surviving officers and NCOs (most of whom are in their twenties) are even busier. They are reporting their position, calling for supporting fires (if needed) and medical assistance. They also are shouting commands, directing troops, and generally trying to maintain order in the midst of chaos, and attempting to simplify what has in an instant become extraordinarily complex.

Making matters worse, the closer the action becomes, the greater the chances that something dark might take place. In his book, *On Killing*, Lt. Col. Dave Grossman (a military-science professor and foremost authority on ground combat) writes, "In order to fight at close range one must deny the humanity of one's enemy."

Yet, the killing must be controlled, and that's almost impossible without superb leadership. Fortunately for American infantry forces, the leaders are so well-trained and the men so well-versed in instant obedience to orders that battlefield atrocities are indeed a rarity. Still there is the human factor and the extreme stress for young infantrymen, who the previous year might have only been concerned with grades, girlfriends, and football tryouts.

The Unpredictable Effects of Stress Retired Marine Col. Wayne V. Morris, who 30-plus-years-ago commanded Kilo Company, 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines (the same company that is today under investigation for the Haditha killings), tells NRO there is more to the story than the public knows. "Since I am a former company commander for 3 / 1, I am on the inside of this issue," he says. "There is much more to come out on this that the media is not reporting," and that includes "issues that will play to the amount of stress the folks were under."

According to Morris, the issue of combat stress "is huge, and the confounding aspect to it is that it affects different people in different ways."

All combatants manage or mismanage it differently, he says. The manifestations of combat stress are not always immediate nor are they obvious, and anyone who served in combat will tell you they have been permanently changed by the experience.

"We all suffer some sort of post-traumatic stress syndrome," says Morris. "And given a certain stressor, we all could fall prey to some sort of unexplained reaction that would not be normally associated with our demeanor."

Morris, who also served as a young lieutenant in a Marine Force Recon unit (deep reconnaissance and special operations), adds, "It's difficult to determine who will perform best under fire. I've seen what many would consider a 'Marvin Milquetoast' turn into a tiger, and watched what some would consider the epitome of a Marine come apart: both individuals during the same combat action. I've also seen a person seemingly weather a very severe action at one given time, and then come-apart during a subsequent and sometimes not nearly as severe action."

Retired Marine Major Frank C. Stolz Jr. agrees. "Some who are heroic one day can become incapable of performing their duties the next and vice versa," says Stolz who, like Morris, commanded a Marine rifle company in Vietnam. "Whenever a member of one's unit is harmed by the enemy in whatever fashion, there is an immediate desire for revenge, as well as one of fear and sometimes of incomprehension. I have more than a few times had to re-instruct my own men that they cannot take out their desire for vengeance on the very innocents that we came to protect."

Retired Marine Lt. Col. Alex Lee, who commanded "special operations elements" in Vietnam, tells NRO that though the stress of combat will always affect the performance of combatants, it does not result in prisoners or civilians being "routinely" killed.

"It does however mean that fear levels are raised to nearly unbearable intensities, and unless the junior leaders live by their training and the core values of Marines, incidents could occur," he says, adding, "Rage at the loss of comrades causes many to seek some way to exact revenge. I have seen this on many occasions, and when you combine confusion with rage it takes hard-nosed leaders to keep emotions in check, otherwise villages get burned and the inhabitants will be killed."

Complicity, Confusion, and Disgust John Temple Ligon, a former Army Ranger officer and artillery forward observer in Vietnam, says that, while he does not condone the killing of 24 civilians, he cannot condemn the Marines, either. "Chances are,

whenever a roadside bomb kills a Marine or a soldier, there are nearby civilians who saw the installation of the bomb and the concealment of the bomb, and the civilians operated at a safe distance when the Marines rolled by," Ligon tells NRO. "In South Vietnam, I saw soldiers lose their feet, legs, and lives as they walked over land mines hidden in the rice paddy berms. The civilians were planting rice at the time nearby, but never near the mines when the soldiers walked by. They, too, knew exactly where the mines lay."

So, as Ligon explains, just as there are no hard-and-fast frontlines in the war on terror, there also is no absolute determinant as to who is and is not the enemy. That's tough for a 19-year-old to process when somebody is trying to kill him every time he shoulders his weapon and walks down the street.

Additionally, some troops on the ground say they are increasingly coming under fire by armed children: a sign of desperation and recruiting woes for the terrorists, but an additional challenge for infantry and special operations units who must confront them.

"This is not new, in war or the Middle East, but seems to be a new trend in Iraq," says former Marine infantryman Robert L. Rohrer, who claims to have seen "several statements" indicating there is much more to the Haditha story than has been released.

Much more indeed, and we will learn a great deal more about it in the coming weeks, which is why the investigations continue.

Are Marine infantrymen, by virtue of the nature of their work, "cold-blooded" killers?

On the contrary: It is because of the nature of their work--usually performed under extreme stress and fatigue--that Marines truly have to be some of the most moral men on the planet if they are going to be effective warriors. That doesn't mean they are flawless.

"[A Marine] lives on the razor's edge of fury and retribution, along with disgust for what he sees, i.e., how the enemy treats their own people," Col. Ripley says. "He is gripped with emotion when he sees children, many the same ages as his own brothers and sisters, and especially when he sees the mothers trying to protect them from the line of fire. He will put himself in great danger, exposing himself to that same fire just in an attempt to remove non-combatants from this danger."

He adds, "a Marine is disgusted when he sees how the enemy treat their own people by putting them in situations where they will assuredly become casualties, for the obvious reason that they can blame it on the Americans."

So it would be unfair and foolish to pass judgment on these Marines, without first finding what exactly happened at Haditha.

--A former U.S. Marine infantry leader, W. Thomas Smith Jr. writes about military issues and has covered conflicts in the Balkans and on the West Bank. He is the author of five books, and his articles appear in a variety of publications.

What We Need To Get Right

Newsweek

By Fareed Zakaria

6/5

I'm glad that the president has finally admitted to some mistakes in Iraq. But what worries me is that he still seems to be persisting in one important error. In his press conference last week, the only concrete plan he outlined to move forward--on a path out of Iraq--was a better-functioning Iraqi Army and police force. In this respect Bush is hardly alone. Many who criticize him on the right and left say that the training of Iraqi troops is happening too slowly, or that we need more American troops, or that we should flood the city of Baghdad with forces to stabilize it. But all of these solutions are technocratic and military, while the problem in Iraq is fundamentally political. Until we fully recognize this, doing more of the same will accomplish little.

Initially the Sunnis thought they could use military power--through the insurgency--to get their way. Now many Shia think they can use military power--through the government's security services and militias--to get their way. For our part, despite the denials, we believed that what we needed was more troops, Iraqi troops. Except that 260,000 Iraqi soldiers and police are "standing up" and it hasn't led to any significant withdrawal of Americans. The reality is that only an effective political bargain will bring about order. There needs to be a deal that gives all three communities strong incentives to cooperate rather than be spoilers.

While the United States can push hard in this direction, forging this bargain falls largely on the shoulders of the new prime minister, Nuri al-Maliki. I met Maliki a year ago in a small safe house in Baghdad, where he sat on a sofa across from me, fingering his prayer beads with practiced precision. He was then a Dawa Party official, with no position in the government. He is a big, strapping man and came across as straightforward and confident. He also came across as a hard-line Shia, unyielding in his religious views and extremely punitive toward the Sunnis. He did not strike me as a man who wanted national reconciliation in Iraq. But many Iraqi and U.S. officials who have spoken to him since he became prime minister believe that he understands his new role. If so, he will have to tackle very quickly the two big political challenges Iraq faces, weakening the insurgency and disbanding sectarian militias. Neither can be done purely militarily.

Co-opting the majority of the Sunnis is the simplest way Maliki can cripple the insurgency. So far he has said some encouraging things about national unity. On the other hand, he has given Sunnis only 11 percent of cabinet posts, though they are 20 percent of the country. Tariq al-Hashimi, the new Sunni vice president, complains that when he details violence by death squads, Iraq's leaders remain highly unresponsive. "Even if you have complete evidence, they are not open-minded. It's really phenomenal," he says.

Maliki will have to stake out national positions on the proposed amendments to the Constitution, the sharing of oil revenue and other such matters. But even sooner he will have to address the core Sunni demand--an end to the de-Baathification process, which has thrown tens of thousands of Sunnis out of jobs and barred them from new ones. Iraq's deputy prime minister, Barham Saleh, a Kurd, told me that "the time has come for us to be courageous enough to admit that there were massive mistakes

in de-Baathification." The American ambassador to Iraq, Zalmay Khalilzad, argued similarly, saying "de-Baathification has to evolve into reconciliation with accountability." Khalilzad added that Prime Minister Maliki supported the notion that de-Baathification "has to focus on individuals who are charged with specific crimes, not whole classes and groups of people." If so, it would mark a major and positive shift in policy.

Maliki's second challenge is with his own. The Shia militias now run rampant throughout non-Kurdish Iraq. Khalilzad believes that they will have to be largely disbanded--"perhaps 5 percent of them can be integrated into the national Army and security services, but most have to be given civilian jobs." The greatest challenge here comes from the large and growing Mahdi Army of Moqtada al-Sadr. This renegade cleric is mounting a frontal challenge to the United States and to the authority of the new Iraqi government (even while he takes charge of some of its ministries). He is popular on the Shia Street, and his gangs run unchecked through the country and dominate large parts of Baghdad. He receives money and support from Iran, which has recognized that Sadr supports its agenda in Iraq--to make trouble for the Americans.

Maliki will have to handle Sadr politically as well as militarily, enlisting Ayatollah Sistani's help. If Maliki cannot handle him, Moqtada al-Sadr will become the most powerful man in Iraq. And Nuri al-Maliki will not be the first elected prime minister of a new Iraq, but the last prime minister of an experiment that failed. Iraq will continue down its slide into violence, ethnic cleansing and Balkanization. In places like Baghdad, with mixed populations, this will mean the city will be carved up into warring neighborhoods, with gangs providing a mafia-style system of law and order, and constant guerrilla attacks. It will be Lebanon in the 1980s, except that 130,000 American troops will be in the middle of it all.

Let Your Enemies Crumble

Time

By Peter Beinart

6/5

For those of us who mistakenly supported the war in Iraq, it is tempting to say we were betrayed by the facts. After all, we backed a war to rid Saddam Hussein of weapons he didn't have.

But, in truth, it was not merely our information that proved faulty; it was also our state of mind. In the run-up to war, the Bush Administration repeated one message again and again: Time was running out. "We have every reason to assume the worst," declared President Bush. "Time is not on our side," insisted Dick Cheney.

James Burnham, the most important conservative foreign-policy thinker of the early cold war, called this "the catastrophic point of view." And a half-century before George W. Bush took office, Burnham urged the Truman Administration to embrace it. In the years following World War II, the U.S. already had a nuclear bomb, and the Soviets were getting closer. So Burnham proposed preventive (what Bush would have called "pre-emptive") war--to protect America before it was too late.

Burnham wasn't the only one. The idea that America must act proactively against its

enemies, or else grow inexorably weaker, was a staple of the cold war right. "Like the boxer who refuses to throw a punch," warned Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater, "the defense-bound nation will be cut down sooner or later." In the 1960s, with China rushing toward the Bomb, preventive war was proposed again.

And once again, American leaders refused. They hewed to containment, a policy premised on a very different mind-set. "The advocates of preventive war with Russia assume that Russia will grow stronger and we will get weaker," argued theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, whose writing influenced the Truman Administration. "Their calculations are not only strategically mistaken but morally wrong." "NSC-68," which outlined the Truman Administration's cold war strategy, predicted it was Moscow that would eventually falter, because the "idea of freedom" is "peculiarly and intolerably subversive of slavery."

Critics attacked containment as passive. But its architects did not propose that America sit back and await victory. They said America could be patient if it strengthened its democratic allies so their desperation did not push them into the arms of the communists. From that came the Marshall Plan. They said America could be patient if it nurtured alliances based on consent, because such alliances would outlast the Soviet bloc, which was held together by brute force. Thus, NATO. And they said America could be patient abroad if it democratically solved problems at home, something the Soviet Union could not do. After the Soviets launched Sputnik, John F. Kennedy said America's cold war struggle depended on American kids learning science. "Every ... measure ... to improve self-confidence, discipline, moral and community spirit," wrote George Kennan, Truman's head of policy planning, "is a diplomatic victory over Moscow."

It was that deeper argument for containment that war supporters like me neglected in the debate over Iraq. When U.N. inspectors re-entered the country in late 2002, they did not find Saddam growing inexorably stronger; they found a corrupt, isolated regime with an infrastructure degrading to the Stone Age. Had America not gone to war, containing Saddam would have been a diplomatic challenge for years to come. But if containment was taking its toll on the U.S., it was taking an even greater toll on Saddam.

Now America faces Iran, another tyranny apparently seeking nuclear weapons. And again, some hear the clock ticking, with time supposedly on the mullahs' side. No one knows how long the Iranian clerics--widely loathed by their own people-- can hold onto power. And no one in Washington knows how close they actually are to the Bomb. But our ability to endure a standoff requires fostering a stable democracy on Iran's borders so Afghanistan and Iraq become bulwarks against theocracy rather than conduits for it. It requires leading our Western allies by persuasion, not command, once again. And it requires confronting great challenges at home: above all, our dependence on foreign oil. There is no guarantee containment will succeed; there never was. But patience, combined with self-improvement, can be a sign of strength. Panic never is.

Peter Beinart is the author of *The Good Fight: Why Liberals--and Only Liberals--Can Win the War on Terror and Make America Great Again*

Wallowing in Haditha

National Review

By Rich Lowry

6/6

It's time to focus on the American warrior. No, it's not Memorial Day, which just passed. It's not Veterans Day, which is months away. Nor is it simply an unprompted occasion to marvel at the bravery and professionalism of America's fighting men and women.

Oh, no, it's one of those very special moments for our military that arrives only upon credible allegations of an American war crime. It appears a handful of Marines murdered two dozen civilians in the Iraqi town of Haditha. Without question, this is big news. But it will be treated as the story of the century, or at least the biggest story since Abu Ghraib. Souls will be searched, hands wrung, and overly broad statements about our stained national honor made. Let the wallowing begin.

There is an obvious agenda here, aside from the instinctive glee much of the media seem to take in any failing of the U.S. military. Haditha is a chance to drive a stake into the heart of the Iraq war. As Newsweek puts it in its Haditha cover story, "The pressure is likely to grow on the Bush administration to bring home the troops, not just to save their lives, but to rescue their honor and decency."

The old story line on Iraq was that the Bush administration didn't send enough troops. The new story line is that it sent too many troops who don't realize it's wrong to shoot girls in the head. Unfortunately, Gen. Pete Chiarelli's decision to give all troops in Iraq "values training" plays into the notion that U.S. personnel are blissfully unaware of the prohibition against murder. This training is redundant and insulting. What's next? Forums reminding troops not to pillage and wantonly burn and destroy?

No military in the history of the planet has ever been as observant of the rules of warfare and as discriminate in its use of force as ours. But no large organization can be utterly free of weak or evil men. In their rush to find a broader meaning in such horrible events, liberals weirdly attenuate their own ability to condemn the perpetrators.

During Vietnam, John Kerry wanted to spread responsibility for the massacre at My Lai far and wide in his attempt to tar the entire war effort and American society. "I think clearly," he told the Senate, "the responsibility for what happened there ... lies in large part with this country, which allows a young child before he reaches the age of 14 to see 125,000 deaths on television." Similarly with Abu Ghraib, liberals were sympathetic to abuse ringleader Charles Grainer's excuse that he was just following orders, since that put the blame on President Bush and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld rather than on a few National Guardsmen out to have perverted kicks.

Already, the excuses are starting for Haditha. Antiwar Rep. John Murtha says of the Marines there that "strain has caused them to crack," and argues that the only way to end this atrocity-causing strain is to get out of Iraq. Two related but contradictory excuses are that the Marines were unprepared to fight an insurgency, and that they were fatigued from being on their third tour. But you can't be both unprepared for Iraq and there for the third time.

A combat environment presents stresses unimaginable to the civilian, and perhaps no combat is more difficult than fighting an urban insurgency. But tens of thousands of American troops have faced it without going door to door killing people in cold blood. Pointing to Haditha and saying that it means we have to leave Iraq would be a little like pointing to the New York City police officer who sodomized a suspect with a broomstick and saying that the NYC Police Department should exit New York because the stresses on its officers are too great.

If Marines in Haditha did what they are accused of, it's a terrible crime unrepresentative of the American military. Period.

-- Rich Lowry is author of *Legacy: Paying the Price for the Clinton Years*. (c) 2006 King Features Syndicate

Hunkering Down

Atlantic
By Fred Kaplan
6/8

A guide to the U.S. military's future in Iraq

Late in February, U.S. Army generals in Iraq started asking military historians and archivists to dig up official records from the 1970s involving the withdrawal of troops from Vietnam. The generals were especially interested in the nitty-gritty of pulling out—procedures for disposing and transferring military property, for example, and the precise sequence of demobilization. The message was explicit: we're going to be staging another withdrawal soon, from Iraq; once it begins, it could spin easily out of control; so we need a plan for an orderly exit now.

And yet, in three years of occupation, the U.S. military has taken steps that suggest a total pullout is unlikely for years to come. The most tangible sign of these measures is the far-flung network of Forward Operating Bases, or FOBs. There are more than seventy FOBs scattered across Iraq, many of them elaborate renovations of Saddam Hussein's former network of military bases and presidential palaces. Some FOBs consist of just a handful of barracks, but more than a dozen of them are vast complexes reminiscent of the West German garrisons from Cold War days.

The larger bases are fortified chunks of Middle America, surreally plunked down in the desert, replete with Burger Kings, Pizza Huts, Internet cafés, first-run movie theaters, gyms, and swimming pools. Camp Anaconda, built around two 11,000-foot runways and spread out over fifteen square miles, is home and workplace to 20,000 U.S. troops and 2,500 private contractors. Camp Cooke, which boasts 29,000 square feet of retail shopping, is so huge that a shuttle bus runs back and forth from one end to the other. At Camp Falcon, Army engineers had to bring in 100,000 tons of gravel just to build the reinforced roads.

There's nothing provisional about these places. They're often referred to as "enduring bases," and there are plans to keep them operating, in American hands, even if all our combat regiments go home. The Pentagon is requesting \$348 million in emergency funds this year for further base construction, beyond the billions already spent.

And so we are operating in an odd state of limbo. It's clear that we're getting out of Iraq, and soon, yet it's equally clear that we're staying, in a fairly big way. We are simultaneously engaged yet disengaging, hunkered down yet packing up.

Here's the little secret that explains the contradiction, understood by all involved: whatever factions end up running the Iraqi government, they'll need—and want—the U.S. military to stick around for many years. This is true no matter what the political mood is stateside.

Over the past year or so—ever since competent American officers were finally put in charge of training local soldiers—the Iraqi army has been growing and improving. Yet the Pentagon estimates that while nearly half of the Iraqi units are able to lead a combat operation, not one can fight by itself. The reasons are plain: the Iraqi military has no air force, no centralized intelligence corps, scant logistics apparatus, and only one armored battalion. As a result, it is—and, for the foreseeable future, will be—unable to coordinate a battle plan, defend the country's borders, provide air support, or protect supply lines. To perform any of these basic tasks, it will need an outside power with professional armed forces. And unless some other country gets involved soon, that outside power will have to be the United States.

Strategy is an art, logistics a science; and the U.S. military has always been extremely adept at science. To supply an army with bullets, bombs, bandages, spare parts, repair kits, fuel, food, water—and to keep all these things moving through the system so nobody runs short—requires extensive planning. For each American soldier capable of going out on patrol or fighting insurgents, there are five support troops supplying his needs, according to an Army spokesman. In other words, of the roughly 130,000 American troops in Iraq today, only about 25,000 are combat troops. Categories overlap, of course; a truck driver in a convoy can find himself in a firefight or be hit by a roadside bomb. Still, when the generals plan how many troops they need, this is the combat-to-support—or “tooth-to-tail”—ratio that shapes their calculations.

Once the Iraqi army stands up and our combat troops stand down—as President Bush puts it—U.S. military planners estimate that the Iraqis will still need 20,000 to 30,000 Americans for logistics, air support, intelligence, and so forth.

But then there's the nightmare scenario: What if there is no Iraqi government to defend? What if the political stalemate between Shiite and Sunni Muslims persists and the “low-grade civil war”—which has been rumbling since Saddam Hussein left Baghdad—erupts into anarchy, an unbridled sectarian war of all against all? If America's mission is to hold Iraq together, what happens if the country falls apart? What do the American troops there do?

Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld was asked this question at a Senate Appropriations Committee hearing in March. His answer was a parody of obfuscation. “The plan,” he replied, “is to prevent a civil war and, to the extent one were to occur, to have the Iraqi security forces deal with it, to the extent they are able to.” No senator asked the logical follow-up question: To what extent are they able to? Nor did anyone pose a more worrisome question: Even if the Iraqis could deal with a civil war themselves, would they want to? If Sunnis and Shiites can't form a national government, if they devolve into implacable sectarian foes, what's to keep the nascent Iraqi army from devolving into sectarian militias?

This is already happening, to a disturbing degree. Southern Iraq is pretty much controlled by Shia militias, northern Iraq by the Kurdish peshmerga. In the turbulent middle territories, nearly all the Iraqi battalions consist entirely of either Sunnis or Shiites, and most of them are more loyal to their religious faction or tribe than to an Iraqi nation.

If Iraq shatters, the Bush administration will be faced with four choices: (1) Try to stop the civil war. (That would involve sending a lot more troops, which seems politically out of the question.) (2) Pick one side and fight alongside it. (Several senior U.S. officers, including two generals, told me they can't imagine a president going this route.) (3) Get out quickly. (4) Hunker down, and stay neutral, till the smoke clears.

Unlike the first two choices, options three and four are at least feasible, because of the FOBs. Almost all these bases are, among other things, air bases. If we decided to get out, personnel could be flown out by helicopters and cargo planes. Missiles, munitions, and ammo stockpiles would probably be blown up on the spot. The heavy equipment would pose a problem. The U.S. Army has about 450 M-1 tanks, 700 Bradley Fighting Vehicles, 300 Stryker vehicles, and 700 M-113 armored personnel carriers in Iraq, all of which could be moved by air, but not quickly. (The C-5, the largest U.S. military cargo plane, can carry just two M-1s; the next largest, the C-17, can carry only one.) Most of these vehicles would probably leave in much the same manner as they had entered—a thunder run south to Kuwait (or north through Kurdistan to Turkey), perhaps while protecting convoys carrying supplies that weren't airlifted out. Insurgents could attack the convoys and do some damage, though they'd also be answered by lots of firepower. (Then again, maybe the insurgents wouldn't want to impede our exit, or maybe they'd be too busy killing rival Iraqis.) Another option would be to leave behind the heavy armor. Building replacement models would cost more than \$5 billion, which is hardly trivial, but not much more than the monthly cost of continuing to fight the war.

The easier option, though, would be to hunker down—especially since we're doing that already. Thousands of troops still go out on dangerous combat patrols or take part in raids and offensives, but the number and scope of these operations have gone down dramatically in the past year. "Most troops are engaged in support functions," one U.S. officer in Iraq told me. "They stay on the big FOBs and never leave." (The combat soldiers have a name for these support troops: "fobbits.")

As the U.S. presence on the ground has diminished, strikes from the air have intensified; they've gone up 50 percent since a year ago, and the number of Iraqi cities hit by these strikes has doubled, from eleven to twenty-two. But when they're on the ground, the pilots and crews—as well as their target planners and traffic controllers—rarely, if ever, step foot off the FOBs.

The FOBs are quite secure. Most of them are situated several miles outside cities—far enough to be invisible to most Iraqis, and close enough so U.S. troops can intervene on short notice. They're surrounded by fortified defense perimeters extending well beyond the base buildings. In this sense, Iraq is not Vietnam or Somalia or Lebanon. By the time the helicopters fled from the Saigon embassy rooftop, all the U.S. troops had been out of Vietnam for more than a year. The eighteen soldiers gunned down in the streets of Mogadishu had inadequate armor and air support. The 241 military personnel killed in Lebanon when a truck bomb

crashed through their gate were on a base that was barely defended. Iraq's insurgents have never been able to mount a sustained assault on an American position. In a full lockdown, the operational trick would be to keep the supply routes open and safe. (Two-thirds of U.S. combat deaths in Iraq, and three-quarters of injuries, have been caused by roadside bombs—a testament both to the vulnerability of convoys and to the security of the FOBs.)

But if things fall apart, the political trick will be to make a case that the mission still makes sense. It would be hard to justify a massive force that just sits there, but an argument could be made for a stripped-down core of 30,000 troops. If all-out civil war erupts, Iraq's neighbors may feel compelled to step in, for reasons of security or aggrandizement—Iran on the side of Shiites, Saudi Arabia backing Sunnis, Turkey quashing the Kurds. The United States would be foolish to get militarily involved in an ethno-regional conflict, but it could help deter or mediate one—and having some troops on the ground, and planes in the air, creates diplomatic leverage. But if this becomes a new rationale for military presence, it can work only as one piece of a larger diplomatic initiative. And it would be best to make contact and establish routines with all the bordering nations now, while we are still merely concerned about the dangers and not yet ravaged in the storm.

Probing A Bloodbath

Newsweek

By Evan Thomas and Scott Johnson

6/12

THE MARINES KNOW HOW TO GET PSYCHED UP FOR a big fight. In November 2004, before the Battle of Fallujah, the Third Battalion, First Marines, better known as the "3/1" or "Thundering Third," held a chariot race. Horses had been confiscated from suspected insurgents, and charioteers were urged to go all-out. The men of Kilo Company--honored to be first into the city on the day of the battle--wore togas and cardboard helmets, and hoisted a shield emblazoned with a large K. As speakers blasted a heavy-metal song, "Cum On Feel the Noize," the warriors of Kilo Company carried a home-made mace, and a ball-and-chain studded with M-16 bullets. A company captain intoned a line from a scene in the movie "Gladiator," in which the Romans prepare to slaughter the barbarians: "What you do here echoes in eternity."

Fallujah was a vicious battle. The 3/1 lost 17 men in 10 days, fighting house to house. But the Marines were prepared. They had been taught to tie a rope to a wounded man to pull him to safety and to lay down a murderous blanket of covering fire. They expected their foe to resort to ruses, like dressing as women and using human shields. But the men of the Thundering Third had been given liberal rules of engagement to make sure people who looked like civilians didn't trigger hidden roadside bombs. "If you see someone with a cell phone," said one of the commanders, half-jokingly, "put a bullet in their f---ing head." During the battle, a TV camera crew photographed a Marine shooting a wounded, unarmed man. The Marine was later exonerated.

Fallujah was another victory for a Marine battalion with a bloody, valorous history--Guadalcanal, Okinawa, Inchon, Cho-sin Reservoir, Huế City. But Haditha, that was different. In the fall of 2005, when Kilo Company arrived in the flyblown city in Anbar province, three hours from Baghdad, up where the jihadists slipped across the Syrian

border, the young Marines were worn out. This was their third tour in Iraq in three years, but they were not quite sure what to expect. The place was alien, sinister. The local jihadists were said to chop off the head of anyone found cooperating with the Americans. The Marines found scores of unexploded IEDs, or improvised explosive devices, but the insurgents seemed to have slipped away--or maybe they'd just gone behind closed doors, or blended into the population. Some of the locals seemed friendly enough, bringing them soft drinks and sweets and even helping them find the bombs. But could they really be trusted? And why didn't anyone warn them about those 155mm artillery shells wired to a telephone, found along the road in mid-November?

The Marine grunts of Kilo Company had been trained to kill, not to practice "counterinsurgency," whatever that meant. Not that their leaders were much better informed. Neither the Army nor the Marines had a counterinsurgency doctrine when the United States invaded Iraq in 2003, and since then soldiers and Marines had received at best patchwork training in the subtle arts of winning hearts and minds. (Indeed, only now, in the late spring of 2006, when the Iraq war has been spluttering along for almost as long as the time it took America to win World War II, is the military finalizing a draft of a manual on counterinsurgency.) Haditha, quiet but menacing for the first several weeks after Kilo Company arrived, is far more the norm in Iraq than the full-scale, all-out fighting of Fallujah. In Haditha, the Marines of Kilo Company sometimes handed out candy to kids but mostly patrolled about in Humvees, making some kind of show of force, presumably, but really just offering themselves as targets.

It is not clear exactly what happened in Haditha on the morning of Nov. 19. One Marine and 24 Iraqis died, that much is certain. Local survivors say Americans on a rampage massacred their neighbors in cold blood. The videotaped eyewitness accounts provided to NEWSWEEK and other news organizations are horrifying, hard to believe in their sordidness and brutality. The Marines at first said 15 civilians, along with Lance Cpl. Miguel Terrazas, 20, had been killed by an IED, and that the rest died in a shoot-out with insurgents. But the official story changed, in part because of a Time magazine exposé in March. Now, according to congressmen who have been briefed by the Pentagon, the military is investigating Kilo Company for possible war crimes. Investigators have seen grisly photographs and are pursuing allegations of a cover-up. Ominously, there are also reports of atrocities in other places, committed by young soldiers who cracked under the pressure of a war fought on a battlefield with no front lines, no easy way to tell civilians from insurgents, and no end in sight.

In Vietnam, when the doleful news came home of burned villages and slaughtered civilians, many Americans blamed the military. Vets came home to be spat upon and called "baby killers." Americans have learned from their disgraceful behavior back then, and generally honor today's Marines, soldiers, sailors and airmen. But increasingly, they blame their leaders for putting young men and women into situations they were not trained or equipped to handle. As more accounts of civilian killings come to light, the pressure is likely to grow on the Bush administration to bring home the troops, not just to save their lives, but to rescue their honor and decency.

Haditha may turn out to be the worst massacre since My Lai. And Iraqis may be entirely justified in their outrage. But the scale of the tragedy should not be exaggerated. America still fields what is arguably the most disciplined, humane

military force in history, a model of restraint compared with ancient armies that wallowed in the spoils of war or even more-modern armies that heedlessly killed civilians and prisoners. The 24 Iraqis killed at Haditha are a fraction of the 300-plus lined up and murdered at My Lai in 1968, just as the roughly 2,500 U.S. soldiers who have perished so far in Iraq pales against the 58,000 dead in Vietnam.

Still, Haditha underscores an uncomfortable truth of the Iraq war. Young men join the Marines to be like the warriors in those recruiting ads, brave knights in noble combat. They do not imagine they're joining a military version of the Peace Corps to be humanitarian workers. In training, they spend endless hours learning how to fire their weapons and kill the enemy. They do not spend much time learning how to be tolerant and neighborly with foreign peoples who speak a different language and practice a different religion. "I'm pissed off that they sent us over there to do a police action," says Kilo Company's Cpl. James Crossan, who was wounded when the IED exploded in Haditha. "There's still a war going on."

The tension between fierce warrior and friendly aid worker is inherent in counterinsurgency, and not necessarily a contradiction. To win hearts and minds--to pacify a village that is threatened or dominated by shadowy insurgents--it is necessary, as the saying goes, to present the locals with a choice: between being their best friend and their worst enemy. But the balance between carrot and stick is often subtle and usually requires highly specialized soldiers to pull it off. Typically, U.S. Special Forces trained in counterinsurgency are older, more mature, better educated and more fluent in foreign languages than your average grunt. But there are not nearly enough Special Forces (about 20,000 worldwide) to go around in Iraq, which means that young soldiers and Marines are left to do the job.

Shortly after the invasion of Iraq in the spring of 2003, Lt. Gen. James Mattis, then commander of the First Marine Division, realized that his men needed to take a more measured, creative approach in dealing with the Iraqi citizenry under occupation. Unlike some Army units, which stayed in their armored vehicles, Mattis's men were ordered to get out into the street and interact with the locals. The Marines played soccer with kids, helped rebuild houses and schools, and--a small detail, but important--took off the sunglasses that made them look like invading aliens. Mattis was ahead of all but a few generals (most notably Lt. Gen. David Petraeus of the 101st Airborne) when it came to embracing the tactics of counterinsurgency.

And yet, Mattis sent unforgivably mixed signals to his troops. Appearing last year on a panel in San Diego near his former home base at Camp Pendleton, Mattis said, "Actually, it's quite fun to fight them. You know, it's a hell of a hoot ... I like brawling. You go into Afghanistan, you got guys who slap women around for five years because they didn't wear a veil. You know, guys like that ain't got no manhood left anyway. So it's a hell of a lot of fun to shoot them."

Mattis was scolded by the top brass for his remarks, but not too harshly, for he had just been nominated by President George W. Bush to become commander of the First Marine Expeditionary Force and head of Marine Forces Central Command. The impact of Mattis's remarks on an average 19-year-old jarhead can be imagined: killing is fun, like videogames.

The Marine Corps, though justly famous for loyalty and discipline, has a "shoot first, ask questions later" mentality, according to some grunts interviewed by NEWSWEEK. The Marines were happy with the loose rules of engagement for the Battle of Fallujah

in 2004--like "the Wild West," said one--and not so keen about the stricter rules for ordinary street patrols imposed since then. One Marine, Cpl. Khalid Aziz of Maryland, mocked the rules: "You're supposed to wave, throw a flashbang, say hi, make a baloney-and-cheese sandwich, shoot in front, shoot the tire, shoot the other tire, have some tea, shoot the engine, then shoot the windshield."

The restrictions, combined with the omnipresent danger, can cause enormous mental strain. In December, NEWSWEEK interviewed some Army soldiers going home as conscientious objectors. To fight boredom and disgust, said Clif Hicks, who had left a tank squadron at Camp Slayer in Baghdad, soldiers popped Benzhexol, five pills at time. Normally used to treat Parkinson's disease, the drug is a strong hallucinogenic when abused. "People were taking steroids, Valium, hooked on painkillers, drinking. They'd go on raids and patrols totally stoned." Hicks, who volunteered at the age of 17, said, "We're killing the wrong people all the time, and mostly by accident. One guy in my squadron ran over a family with his tank."

Hicks's own revulsion peaked while he was on patrol in January 2004. He came upon a bloody scene in a Baghdad housing project, where some soldiers had mistaken celebratory shots fired at a wedding for an attack, returning heavy fire and killing a young girl. "I looked in the door and she was dead, shot through the neck, Mom there, Grandma there, all losing it. Then I started thinking, this is really f---ed up, this is horribly wrong." Hicks stopped taking his malaria pills, hoping he'd get sick and shipped out. He says that infantry soldiers sometimes stick their legs out of the Humvee under sniper fire, hoping to get a nonlethal wound.

Hicks claims that "there's a lot of guys who steal from the Iraqis. Money, family heirlooms, and then they brag about it. Guys would crap into MRE bags and throw them to old men begging for food."

The accounts of Hicks and some other vets returning as C.O.s or with disabilities are obviously tinged with bitterness and may be exaggerated. But Iraqi leaders have long protested abuses by the American occupiers (even as they privately beseech the Americans to stay and keep the country from falling into civil war). Last week Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki was quoted by The New York Times saying that many troops in the American-led Coalition "do not respect the Iraqi people. They crush them with their vehicles and kill them just on suspicion. This is completely unacceptable." (Maliki later said he was misquoted, but the Times found only a minor mistranslation--Maliki did not say that the violence was a "daily phenomenon" but rather a "regular occurrence.") In an interview with NEWSWEEK, Iraq's ambassador to the United States, Samir Sumaidaie, was equally blunt about an atrocity that, he claims, happened to his own family. A year ago, says Sumaidaie, Marines raided the home of his cousin, a school principal in a small village in Anbar province. The Marines shot the man's son, a student home from college. The only weapon in the house was an AK-47 loaded with blanks. Ambassador Sumaidaie protested all the way to Gen. George Casey, the Coalition forces commander, but was told that the Americans fired in self-defense--and that the ambassador had to file a Freedom of Information Act request if he wanted to see the investigative file. "It was a cold blooded murder," says Sumaidaie. The killers, he says, "should be weeded out openly and without hesitation."

Civilians are routinely killed in Iraq in ambiguous situations--during fire fights with insurgents or when they fail to slow down and stop at a checkpoint. It is difficult to know how often the shootings are unwarranted or could be called war crimes.

Investigations tend to get launched and then drag on and sometimes just fade away. Lately, however, more charges have been popping up in the press. Last week American investigators cleared an Army commander who had led a raid in the village of Ishaqi that killed as many as nine civilians, according to U.S. estimates. Iraqi police had charged that the Americans executed civilians, including a 75-year-old woman and 6-month-old baby. In a separate case, several Marines and at least one Navy corpsman are in the brig or confined to base at Camp Pendleton, waiting to find out if they will be charged in the killing of an Iraqi man on April 26. According to news reports, Marines pulled the man from his house and shot him, then planted a weapon by his body to make it appear that he was an insurgent.

The incident at Haditha is sure to attract massive media attention as it winds through the military criminal-justice system. No men have been charged with any wrongdoing, and a lawyer who represents two Marines under investigation has angrily declared that "the bastards who are leaking information should be strung by their necks in a public square." The attorney, David Brahms, a retired brigadier general who was the corps's top lawyer in the 1980s, says, "There are some startling things that are going to come out down the road and not from the mouths of the Pentagon." But he would not say what.

The stories told by the villagers of Haditha are bloodcurdling. Nov. 19 was a "shiny morning," clear and chilly, recalled Thair Thabit al-Hadithi, who was sound asleep when the explosion went off. It was an enormous clap that shook the walls. He rushed to the kitchen window and looked across the street. An IED had gone off nearby, killing an American soldier, though Thabit did not know that. He could hear voices outside, then soldiers shouting in English: "F---, f---," he thought he heard them say. The shouts grew louder and were drowned by other sounds, the crackle of a machine gun and the sound of flashbang grenades. Thabit could see American troops heading toward the house of his neighbor Abdel Hamid Hassan. He couldn't see how many Marines went into Hassan's house, but he could soon see smoke pouring out the window.

A novice journalist, Thabit went to the morgue the next morning with a video camera. In Hassan's house, seven of the 11 members of the family had been found dead. The elderly patriarch--blind, and confined to a wheelchair--had been shot at close range, along with his wife. The Marines hit two other houses, smashing furniture and shooting occupants, Thabit recounted in an interview with NEWSWEEK.

One of those houses was owned by Jamal Ayed Ahmed, 40, a used-car salesman. He was there with his three brothers, a policeman, a local bureaucrat and a college student. "The Americans came and asked Jamal, 'Erhab? Erhab? [Terrorism? Terrorism?],' and he said, 'No'," recalled Jamal's wife, Asmaa, who was interviewed on videotape by a human-rights investigator hired by NEWSWEEK to help report. The Marines demanded to know, "Do you have any weapons?" The brothers produced two AK-47s, one with five bullets inside.

The scene apparently became chaotic. One of the women in the house was pushing frantically on a door to one of the rooms; the Americans tried to get the women to stop screaming. Shots rang out and the Americans left. The four brothers were found dead in a small room.

Hiba Abdullah, another Haditha resident who spoke on videotape, recalled lying in bed with her husband, Rashid, when the IED exploded in front of her house. "I

opened my eyes and looked at Rashid and he told me, 'I swear that we will die'." Hiba asked, "Why do you say that?" but the shrapnel was already starting to come down, Hiba recalled. "It was like rain."

The Americans were soon shooting at Hiba's door. They entered and started rounding up family members. Hiba heard two shots, then her mother-in-law saying, "Oh my God." There were more shots and Rashid cried out, "They killed my mother!" Hiba tried to hush her husband, and heard an American soldier say to her father-in-law, "You, you." They shot him in the chest as he tried to stand, recalled Hiba, crying as she spoke into the camera. The soldiers were laughing and saying "OK" and "good" as they counted the bodies. Hiba says she saw her mother-in-law lying on the ground, with her hands raised in the air. The American soldiers, she says, shot the woman as she lay there.

The saddest and ugliest story was told to a NEWSWEEK reporter by a 12-year-old girl named Safa Younis. When the Marines entered her house that morning, she fled with her mother into a bathroom. A soldier followed them, shooting, she says. When the soldiers left, Safa tried to talk to her mother, but she was covered with blood. "Mama, Mama," cried the girl, until she realized that her mother was dead. So was her father, whom she found lying near the kitchen door. And her aunt, and her five siblings--all shot to death. "I was sorry for staying in the bathroom. I should have died like them," recalls Safa, who now lives with a cousin. "The Americans are murderers, criminals. They have no mercy."

The Americans directly involved in the Haditha incident are not talking. But a corporal who was on Kilo Company's civil-affairs team--the Marines who come in after the battle to deal with the civilians--offered NEWSWEEK a different, if far less complete version of events.

On the morning of Nov. 19, "the entire city was in an uproar," says Scott Jepsen, who was monitoring the radio back at Kilo Company's base in Haditha. Jepsen, who is now a sheriff in New Jersey, was on a team sent to do a damage assessment of Iraqi homes. The team later paid out money to civilians who had lost family members. It is common practice to compensate civilians or their families wounded or killed by American fire, up to \$2,500 per civilian; at Haditha, the Marines handed out a total of \$38,000 to relatives of 15 victims. Jepsen went through the houses entered by the Marines. He recalls talking to one resident, a divorce lawyer. "He wasn't showing much emotion," says Jepsen. "It was weird." Jepsen says the Iraqis they spoke to "knew that there were insurgents involved ... knew that there were some houses that let insurgents in." The former corporal insists that four men and a taxi driver gunned down as they fled a cab at the scene of the bombing were also insurgents. Locals told the Marines that the men were on their way to school, while Jepsen contends, "there was not one school open that day." (According to residents videotaped by the human-rights worker, the students were on their way to a technical college in Baghdad.) Jepsen says the Iraqi civilians are lying and covering up in Haditha. There were "no executions," he says.

The American top brass appears to suspect otherwise. A formal criminal investigation now underway may take months, but an investigation into a possible cover-up could produce results more quickly. Eager to avoid another Abu Ghraib, with its leaked photographs and stumbling official response, the Pentagon has brought in a big gun to investigate, Army Maj. Gen. Eldon Bargewell, a veteran Special Forces operator who once ran Delta Force and is known as a no-nonsense type. The thinking behind

the investigation, said a senior officer on the Joint Staff, was, "Go fast, go senior, go independent."

Though no one is talking openly at Camp Pendleton, Marines and their families are buzzing about what might have gone wrong inside Kilo Company. The wife of a staff sergeant in the 3/1 battalion, who declined to be identified because she doesn't want to get her husband in trouble, told NEWSWEEK that there was "a total breakdown" in discipline and morale after Lt. Col. Jeffrey Chessani took over as battalion commander when the unit returned from Fallujah at the start of 2005. (Chessani's friends in his Colorado hometown defended him as a dedicated, patriotic, religious Marine.) "There were problems in Kilo Company with drugs, alcohol, hazing, you name it," said the woman. "I think it's more than possible that these guys were totally tweaked out on speed or something when they shot those civilians in Haditha."

But Lucian Read, a freelance photographer who spent seven months with Kilo Company, both in Fallujah and Haditha, did not see warning signs. "Their morale wasn't bad, it was more fatalistic; this is the grunts-get-screwed-every-time," he said. "They were not happy, not pleased, but not angry, either," Read said. "Nothing they ever did or said even hinted at this kind of event. I never saw it coming. No one saw it coming."

When marines of the Thundering Third returned home to Pendleton this past winter, they were given sensitivity training and told to stop using some of their more-offensive call signs, like "Slayer" and "Killer." They were also admonished against the usual growling retorts of a Marine grunt, a kind of "rrrrr" sound. "Everyone was wondering, 'Why this soft stuff?' " says the wife of the 3/1 staff sergeant. Since the Haditha scandal broke, however, all Marines--not just the ones in the 3/1--are being required to spend more time learning "core values."

What the Marines and all the U.S. soldiers in Iraq really need is better training in counterinsurgency. After losing a guerrilla war in Southeast Asia in the 1960s and early '70s, the Pentagon inexplicably chose not to learn from its mistakes, but rather focused on more-conventional warfare, which favored American technology. Guerrilla fighting was left to Special Forces, the "snake eaters" disdained by most regular Army and Marine commanders. When General Casey took over as commander of U.S. and Coalition forces in Iraq two years ago, he told his staff to set up a meeting with his HQ's counterinsurgency expert. He was told there wasn't one.

That story is told in an essay called "Fire the Generals!" written by retired Col. Douglas MacGregor, who was one of the architects of the original lean-and-mean invasion of Iraq. The initial, sudden and overwhelming rout of Saddam's rotten Army gave the military a false sense of superiority. Some at the top knew the victory was hollow. As the insurgency began to take shape, the then acting chief of staff of the Army, Gen. Jack Keane, warned his fellow chiefs, "The United States Army does big wars. We do them better than anyone. But we have no skills in counterinsurgency."

In July 2003, Gen. John Abizaid, the commander of all U.S. forces in the region, acknowledged that the United States faced a "classic guerrilla-type campaign." But MacGregor points out that Abizaid did nothing to alter American deployments or tactics. Rather, he exhorted everyone to turn over responsibility to the Iraqis--who had no military or police force worth mentioning. The Joint Staff was extremely slow to provide the training teams needed to build a new Iraqi Army.

MacGregor also faulted U.S. generals for not accompanying platoon and squad leaders as they patrolled--to better understand their environment and what they needed to survive in it. Had the generals done so, writes MacGregor, they would have known what a sergeant on patrol in Ramadi meant when he told a journalist, "You can have my job. It's easy. You just have to drive around all day and wait for someone to bomb you. Thing is, you have to hate Arabs."

Left to their own devices, grunts sometimes improvise. It is possible that Kilo Company was determined to "leave a calling card," which is to say, to warn Haditha that IEDs would be met with heavy retribution. It's an old and primitive counter-insurgency tactic. Long ago, the Romans used it against barbarians.

Rules of Engagement

Time

By Wesley Clark; Reuel Marc Gerecht; Gary Solis; Philip Caputo

6/12

PHILIP CAPUTO

Incidents like this are not just likely; they're inevitable in insurgencies. They happened in Vietnam and even to the British, who committed atrocities during the American Revolution. They happen because one of the things an insurgent does is attack the counterinsurgent's state of mind. The insurgent makes the counterinsurgent feel constantly insecure, constantly scared and constantly unaware of who or where the enemy is. The guy fighting the insurgent often feels lost in a hostile sea.

One of the reasons I wrote the Vietnam memoir *A Rumor of War* was to show how that kind of war can bring out a psychopathic streak in men of otherwise normal behavior and impulses. When a soldier is fighting guerrillas, he can often feel like a helpless victim. I imagine that must be especially true in Iraq with these roadside bombs. After a while, that's got to bring out a killer instinct in even the best troops. And soldiers in combat get very close to one another. That's one of the saving graces of battle, but it can work against you if the loss of a beloved comrade drives a soldier to go over the edge and seek revenge.

A former Marine lieutenant, Caputo is the author most recently of the novel *Acts of Faith*

GARY SOLIS

Some battlefield acts are so clearly contrary to the training and ethos of Marines and all service members that they remain unacceptable in any circumstance. A basic law of war is that noncombatants may never be purposely targeted. Today's Marine is better educated, better trained and better led than ever before. Marines of all ranks are aware of the standards of battlefield conduct. Yet there apparently was a disregard of those standards by a very few. Even in a combat zone, one can commit murder, and Haditha looks like such a case.

But never forget the thousands of Marines, many on their third and fourth tours,

whose conduct on this most treacherous of battlefields has been not just honorable, but selfless and heroic. And even if proved, Haditha is no My Lai, with its victims in the hundreds, attendant sexual crimes, direct officer involvement and high-level cover-up by a dozen officers, including colonels and generals.

A lawyer and former Marine lieutenant colonel who served in Vietnam, Solis has taught courses in the law of war at West Point and Georgetown University

REUEL MARC GERECHT

To their credit, modern Western democracies feel shame in combat more profoundly than other countries. We have done terrible things--in World War II, the Korean War, Vietnam and now, it strongly appears, in Haditha in Iraq. These dark moments--indiscriminately bombarding German civilians in World War II, mowing down Vietnamese peasants at My Lai--do not necessarily diminish the rightness of the cause for which we fight. For Americans, in whom isolationism runs deep, it is perhaps reflexive to feel revulsion and want to withdraw from conflicts and commitments where young Americans can do evil things.

Truth be told, however, if American forces were more aggressively engaged in a real counterinsurgency campaign in Iraq--where our primary objective would be to secure Iraqis and their homes from insurgent and sectarian threat--we would have seen more American abuses. Successful counterinsurgencies are always ugly and morally challenging. What is so sad in Iraq is that the civilian losses caused by the U.S. are not compensated by a larger American military effort to secure the country from holy warriors, insurgents and sectarian militiamen who live to slaughter innocent civilians and Iraq's chance for a more humane, democratic future. President Bush, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and their General John Abizaid, not any Marines at Haditha who ran amuck, are responsible for this far darker tragedy.

A former Middle East specialist at the CIA, Gerecht is a resident fellow at the American Enterprise Institute in Washington

WESLEY CLARK

If the Haditha reports are true, there can be no excuse. Not stress. Not anger. Not frustration. But this incident raises more disturbing questions. Have there been other such incidents? Does it indicate progressive decay in the standards of discipline in our forces? On top of Abu Ghraib, what moral authority do our forces retain? Can we recover our standing in the eyes of the Iraqis? And what will the ramifications of this incident be for U.S. power worldwide?

In war, terrible fears and passions are unleashed, with often unpredictable consequences. But military leaders know this--and they are charged with accomplishing the mission and protecting the troops, all without sacrificing our values. They'll do their best, even to accomplish the impossible. It's up to our political leaders to task them and give them the resources and to know and respect our limitations. And so Haditha must be a clear warning to the politicians: the window for effective U.S. action is almost closed; don't break our forces trying to salvage a failing mission when we've got more to do elsewhere.

Clark, a retired four-star general and former NATO commander, heads the political-action committee WesPAC

The Tightrope Walker

Time

By Aparisim Ghosh

6/12

Few politicians owe as much to another country's government as Nouri al-Maliki owes to the Bush Administration. In April, strong U.S. backing catapulted al-Maliki into his job as Iraq's Prime Minister after a two-month impasse over the nomination of his predecessor, Ibrahim al-Jaafari. Sunni and Kurdish politicians say U.S. Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad leaned heavily on them to back al-Maliki. "Khalilzad made it clear there was only one man on Washington's wish list," a senior Kurdish leader told TIME on condition of anonymity. "Al-Maliki cannot have any doubts about why he got the job."

And so it was slightly surprising last week to watch al-Maliki appear to bite the hand that made him. In an unexpectedly angry response last week to questions about the Haditha slayings, al-Maliki accused U.S. forces of misconduct even beyond the actions of the Marines last Nov. 19.

"This is a phenomenon that has become common among many of the multinational forces," he said. "No respect for citizens, smashing civilian cars and killing on a suspicion or a hunch. It's unacceptable." Iraqis saw in al-Maliki's outburst a bid to counter the perception that he is Washington's stooge. "Maybe he feels he needs to show he doesn't take orders from the American embassy," says Mithal Alussi, one of the few members of Parliament not aligned with any of the power blocs in al-Maliki's national-unity government.

For the moment, U.S. officials are downplaying al-Maliki's tough talk. "The comments from Prime Minister al-Maliki are expected and understood," says a senior adviser to President Bush. Indeed, al-Maliki's remarks may have been intended less for the U.S. government than for members of his own. Haditha is in the restive, Sunni-dominated Anbar province, and al-Maliki needs the support of Sunni politicians just to keep his government functioning. Ayad Jamaluddin, a secular member of Parliament, says al-Maliki's task is "to pilot a plane in which every single passenger has a different destination."

Al-Maliki, 56, is an unlikely unifier. In his previous job as spokesman for al-Jaafari's Islamic Dawa Party, he was known as a Shi'ite partisan. But he gained the trust of some Sunni politicians during last year's tortured negotiations over Iraq's constitution, when he was one of several politicians who helped cobble together a temporary compromise with Sunni and Kurdish groups.

And yet despite being the candidate least objectionable to both Washington and Iraq's feuding parties, al-Maliki comes to the job with considerable liabilities. For one, he lacks a public profile. Most Iraqis had not heard of him when he was named a candidate for al-Jaafari's job. More damaging is the fact that his party is allied with powerful Shi'ite groups that control the very militias he says he wants to crush. Criticizing U.S. troops will help him gain some street cred--if Iraqis believe he is serious. In the 10 weeks since the Haditha incident was made public, he showed little interest in the alleged massacre--until his outburst last week.

But the real test of his resolve will come in the Shi'ite heartland city of Basra. Before he spoke out on Haditha, the Prime Minister's anger was directed at the city's warring Shi'ite gangs. Promising to use "an iron fist" against them, al-Maliki declared a state of emergency in the city. But it will take more than rhetoric to bring the gangs to heel. They too are connected to Shi'ite parties and militias, and the local security forces that are expected to enforce the emergency are infiltrated by partisans.

If he hopes to bring order back to Basra, al-Maliki may well have to turn to the very coalition troops he was lambasting last week.

"No respect for citizens, smashing cars and killing on a suspicion or a hunch. It's unacceptable."

How Haditha Came to Light

Time

By Jeffrey Kluger

6/12

The Haditha killings occurred last November, but it wasn't until January that TIME first heard whispers about them. The initial account of the incident was published in March in the magazine and on TIME.com. The manner in which TIME got the story and the painstaking way the facts revealed themselves illustrate the challenges of trying to cover a dangerous, deadly conflict where the truth isn't always what it appears to be.

If the Marines are indeed guilty of an atrocity, they had the ill fortune to have committed their crime in the worst possible place: outside the front door of a budding Iraqi journalist and human-rights activist. Taher Thabet, 43, was at home in Haditha on the morning of Nov. 19 when around 7:15 he heard the detonation of the roadside bomb that struck a Marine humvee, killing the driver, Lance Corporal Miguel Terrazas, 20. The blast shattered Thabet's windows. He ran outside in time to see Marines from three other humvees springing from their vehicles and heading for four homes on either side of the road. "They went into one house. I heard gunfire, explosions and screams," he told TIME in an interview in Baghdad last month. "Then they came out and went into another. I could only stand and watch."

The next morning, Thabet--who last year co-founded a small outfit called the Hammurabi Organization for Human Rights and Democracy Monitoring--went into the houses where the killings had taken place and videotaped what he saw, as well as the wrenching scenes later at the local morgue, where friends and family collected the bodies of the victims. "I didn't know what I was recording," he says. "I just felt I had to record everything I could see."

Thabet shared the VCD with the other members of the Hammurabi group, but for a time, news of the killings did not go further than that. Then, in mid-December, President George W. Bush announced the military's estimate that 30,000 Iraqi civilians had died since the start of the war. TIME's Tim McGirk, posted in Baghdad, began to investigate cases in which Iraqi civilians had been killed by U.S. troops. In the course of his reporting, he obtained a copy of Thabet's VCD. There was plenty in

the grisly images to raise suspicions, including the U.S.-issued body bags into which the victims were zipped and the scattering of shells that appeared to have come from Marine rifles.

McGirk contacted Marine headquarters in Ramadi to inquire about the incident. The Marines sent back an e-mail saying there were 15 civilian deaths in Haditha on Nov. 19 but that the victims were killed by the roadside bomb and by a firefight that erupted when insurgents fired on the Marines. But the videotape showed that many of the dead were pajama-clad women and children. The bodies had wounds from bullets, not shrapnel, and the scene suggested that they had been murdered inside their homes.

In the ensuing weeks, McGirk and TIME's Baghdad staff members interviewed more than a dozen Haditha locals by e-mail (travel between Baghdad and Haditha is exceedingly dangerous for Iraqis, let alone foreign journalists), including the mayor, the morgue doctor and a local lawyer who negotiated a settlement between the Marines and the families under which the military agreed to pay \$2,500 compensation apiece for some of the victims--mostly the women and children. Several survivors visited TIME's Baghdad bureau, including a man in his 20s whose four brothers were killed and an orphaned girl who is now the sole caretaker of her 8-year-old brother. The bureau was also pursuing leads that a 12-year-old girl had survived the attack by playing dead. In interviews, Thabet filled in details about what he witnessed before he began shooting his VCD.

In early February, McGirk presented this evidence to, and asked for comment from, Lieut. Colonel Barry Johnson, U.S. military spokesman in Baghdad. Johnson viewed the VCD, listened to the accounts and responded straightforwardly, "I think there's enough here for a full and formal investigation." Army Colonel Gregory Watt was dispatched to Haditha to conduct a three-week probe in which he interviewed Marines, survivors and doctors at the morgue.

At that point, TIME's Aparisim Ghosh joined the efforts in Baghdad, asking the U.S. military for more information even as the preliminary investigation was continuing. Lacking any official U.S. response to the allegations, TIME chose not to publish an article on the episode in Haditha based solely on the eyewitnesses' accounts. On March 14, a U.S. military official in Baghdad familiar with the Watt probe finally responded to Ghosh. According to the official, the probe concluded that the civilians were in fact killed by Marines and not by an insurgent's bomb--but that the deaths appeared to be the result of "collateral damage" rather than malicious intent. Nevertheless, the official told Ghosh, the matter had been handed over to a criminal investigation. Over the next five days, the reporting by McGirk and Ghosh continued to be reviewed by TIME editors and Pentagon correspondent Sally B. Donnelly. TIME's story "One Morning in Haditha" was published on March 19 on TIME.com and appeared the next day in the print magazine (which carried a March 27 cover date). The Haditha episode began to receive wider coverage last month, when members of Congress revealed that Pentagon and military officials had disclosed that Marines may be charged in connection with the alleged massacre and that a cover-up might have taken place.

If there is any beneficiary at all of the tragedy, it is Hammurabi, the human-rights group, which is flooded with new volunteers and free to do its work more aggressively. Still, Thabet says his thoughts are mostly with the 24 who died. "Nobody cares about what happens to ordinary Iraqis," he says. They do now.

Several survivors visited TIME's bureau, including a man whose four brothers were killed.

Streets of Blood

Time

By Aparism Ghosh

6/12

To understand just how brutal the war in Iraq has become, spend a day at work with Sheik Jamal al-Sudani. A Baghdad mortician, he travels to the holy city of Najaf every Friday to bury the capital's unclaimed and unknown dead--the scores of bodies that turn up every day, bearing no identifying characteristics save the method by which they were murdered. On a typical trip to the Wadi al-Salaam cemetery last month, Sheik Jamal and a small band of volunteers unload the grim cargo they have brought 100 miles from the Iraqi capital in an old flatbed truck. Sheathed in powder-blue body bags are the remains of 72 men, many of them bearing signs of terrible torture--holes in the skull made by power drills, mutilated genitals, burns. They are the signature of the shadowy Shi'ite groups that have been kidnapping and murdering hundreds of men and boys, most of them Sunnis, in a campaign that has terrorized Baghdad's neighborhoods.

On any given Friday, Sheik Jamal inters Iraqis killed by roadside bombs ("I can tell how close they were to the blast from the extent of burning and depth of the shrapnel wounds"), execution ("Their hands are usually tied behind their back, and they've been shot in the head"), garroting and beheading. He buries victims of U.S. air strikes, some of whose bodies have been fused together by the heat of the explosion "so you can't tell which limb belongs to which head." Every now and again, he will get a body bag with charred-black body parts, dismembered by massive explosions. Those are the remains of suicide bombers. "When you explode a bomb strapped to your chest," he says, "it tears up your body in a particular way."

Death comes to Iraq now in many new and terrible forms. Though there is outrage among many Iraqis about the alleged massacre in Haditha last November, the violence on Iraq's streets is so unrelentingly horrific that even the worst atrocities have lost their power to shock. Few Iraqis even know how many people have died by the bullets and bombs. Definitive statistics are impossible to find in a country where the most violent provinces are out of bounds for journalists and human-rights workers, and where the state infrastructure--hospitals, morgues, police stations--is not up to the task of caring for the living, never mind counting the dead. According to the Iraq Body Count project, the most frequently cited source, at least 38,000 Iraqi civilians have been killed since May 1, 2003, when President George W. Bush announced that "major combat operations" had ended. More controversially, a study in the British medical journal *Lancet* in November 2004 put the toll at more than 100,000 since the invasion. Both studies say more than 4 in 10 of those deaths are attributable to U.S. forces.

Certainly in recent months, most of the violence has been Iraqi-on-Iraqi, with civilians being killed by Shi'ite death squads or Sunni insurgents and jihadis. U.S. forces often find themselves trying to prevent Iraqis from killing one another. On the same day that Iraq's Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki announced that the government

would launch an investigation into the 24 Haditha killings and called U.S. attacks against Iraqi civilians "a regular occurrence," at least 18 Iraqis died at the hands of their countrymen. The rate of sectarian killings has escalated sharply since the Feb. 22 bombing of a major Shi'ite shrine in Samarra. In Baghdad alone, morgue officials say they have received at least 3,500 bodies since the bombing. Some of those officials have told TIME they routinely understated the toll because of political pressure from the interim Iraqi government to deny that the capital was in the throes of a civil war.

How do Iraqis make sense of the carnage? For many, the only way to cope is to block out the daily reports of civilian deaths--such as the story of U.S. troops' opening fire last week on a car carrying two women, or of Islamic extremists gunning down a tennis coach and two of his players last month for wearing shorts. Iraqis honed their imperviousness to atrocity under Saddam Hussein, when the regime killed hundreds of thousands of Iraqi citizens. But the sheer numbers of victims from this war has deepened the desensitization. That may explain why the debates about the overall death toll don't seem to resonate with many Iraqis. "What is the use of numbers?" asks Mithal Alussi, a secular, independent member of the Iraqi Parliament. "When you reach a point when every Iraqi can say that a member of his family or a close friend was killed, then statistics don't matter anymore. You don't need numbers to tell you it's a national catastrophe."

The Iraqi media had little interest in the Haditha story until last week, when it emerged that the Marines involved were likely to be punished. When TIME's first Haditha story ran in March, it was picked up by most of the Arab TV stations beaming into Iraq, but the local channels and newspapers repeated it with no comment or further reporting of their own. A senior Western diplomat who monitors the Iraqi media was surprised: "They treated it as just another atrocity, nothing special." There is one other explanation: Iraqis take it for granted that the military--any military--will mistreat and murder civilians. After all, that's how their own soldiers behaved for decades. They expected no different from the Americans, so there was a built-in propensity to believe that many, or most, Iraqis killed by U.S. forces were innocent victims of oppression. That is especially true in the Sunni triangle, but many Shi'ites believe it too, especially those who follow the radical anti-American cleric Muqtada al-Sadr. The Abu Ghraib scandal merely confirmed what they had suspected all along, that George Bush's soldiers were no different from Saddam's. Haditha was simply more of the same. But the possibility that Americans may be punished for killing Iraqis--that, at least, is new. Saddam's soldiers were rarely brought to justice for their crimes.

And yet it is a sign of Iraqis' utter mistrust of the leaders who have replaced Saddam that anger over Haditha has been directed as much toward the Iraqi government as toward U.S. troops. Like many Iraqis across the country, the survivors accuse their elected leaders of cocooning themselves in a highly fortified Baghdad enclave, with little thought for the plight of their countrymen. "The concrete walls of the Green Zone are too high, so they can't see what's happening to us," says Khaled Raseef, the spokesman for the Haditha victims' kin. Whatever they think of the Marines, Raseef says he was impressed with the thoroughness with which the U.S. military has investigated the killings. As of last week, he says, nobody from the Iraqi government had contacted him for an account of what happened.

Sheik Jamal's views on the Americans are not hard to divine--in his spare time he's a volunteer in al-Sadr's office in Baghdad's Sadr City neighborhood. But his take on the

Haditha killings is purely practical: the local morgue dealt with those bodies, and they were all claimed by family members, so they aren't his problem. He has more pressing concerns. The escalation of killings in Baghdad puts him under tremendous financial strain: he makes his living as a professional mortician but receives no payment for burying unclaimed bodies, which he sees as a religious duty. He estimates that each body he buries costs him \$20, including the price of the body bag, the coarse white cotton shroud, gravediggers' fees, transportation costs and the grave itself. Recently, he's taken to burying two bodies in each grave.

Money is only one of his problems. The Friday trips to Najaf are fraught with danger. The road from Baghdad runs through some of the most lawless parts of Iraq, where criminals routinely kill commuters to take their cars and terrorists have been known to attack funeral corteges. Sheik Jamal says his weekly convoy--one truck and several carloads of volunteers--has never been attacked, a fact he attributes to divine intervention. "It's God's work, and he finds a way for us to do it," he says.

It's late in the morning at the Wadi al-Salaam cemetery by the time Sheik Jamal and his volunteers have completed their grim mission. The 72 bodies have been sprayed with disinfectant, wrapped in shrouds and buried. Sheik Jamal thanks the gravediggers, shaking their hands. "I will be in touch," he says. "I'll call and let you know how many [graves] we need next week." Stretching out into the desert, the graveyard is unlikely to run out of space. And since the killings of Iraqis show no sign of slowing, Sheik Jamal will not run out of bodies either.

Haditha Handwringing

Weekly Standard
By William Kristol
6/12

U.S. MARINES are under investigation for alleged misconduct in the deaths of Iraqi civilians. The inquiry into the events at Haditha last November 19 is ongoing--but the Nation's editors already know what happened: A U.S. "war crime"! A military "massacre"! A "cover-up"! (And also a "willful, targeted brutality designed to send a message to Iraqis"--something a cover-up would seem to make more difficult.) The anti-American left can barely be bothered to conceal its glee.

As for the pro-American left, they write more in sorrow than in anger. Here's The New Republic's Peter Beinart:

Americans can be as barbaric as anyone. What makes us an exceptional nation with the capacity to lead and inspire the world is our very recognition of that fact. We are capable of Hadithas and My Lais, so is everyone. But few societies are capable of acknowledging what happened, bringing the killers to justice, and instituting changes that make it less likely to happen again. That's how we show we are different from the jihadists. We don't just assert it. We prove it. That's the liberal version of American exceptionalism, and it's what we need right now in response to this horror.

No, it isn't. The last thing we need in response to Haditha is hand-wringing liberalism. The war against the jihadists, a war Beinart supports, is not a metaphorical one. Liberals may want to win a war on terror without fighting, and are shocked that in a war, crimes and abuses occur. But here's the hard, Trumanesque

truth: In war, terrible things happen, including crimes and abuses and cover-ups.

Let's be clear: Crimes and cover-ups cannot be excused or tolerated. They must be investigated, and the individuals involved, and their commanders, must be held accountable and punished. As the Marine Corps commandant points out, the Marine Hymn pledges that we "keep our honor clean." This is happening. All nations' soldiers commit crimes, and decent nations punish them. But it is not true that "what makes us an exceptional nation with the capacity to lead and inspire the world" is that we recognize we can be barbaric and that we punish barbarism.

What makes us exceptional is that we stand for liberty, and that we are willing to fight for liberty. We don't need to "prove" we are different from the jihadists by bringing our own soldiers, if they have done something wrong, to justice. Of course we must and will do this. But our doing this "proves" nothing. Even if there were ten Hadithas, we would still not have to "prove" that we are "different from the jihadists." The idea would be offensive if it were not ludicrous.

What we do have to prove is that we are strong enough to fight this war, and intelligent enough to win it. Our political and military leadership has to be serious enough to reconsider failing tactics and strategy, and capable enough to do what it takes to win.

Supporters of the war have engaged in a vigorous debate, in these pages and elsewhere, about how better to fight this war. It would be encouraging if more people at senior levels of the military seemed to be engaged in this kind of serious thinking and rethinking. It would be encouraging if more civilians high up in the Pentagon were engaged in such a debate. It would be encouraging if a single person in the White House seemed to be engaged in a real effort to learn from mistakes, so as to adjust our policy to make success more likely.

The American people understand we are at war. They will support what has to be done. The remarkable men and women in uniform will do their jobs in an exemplary way. The military leadership seems competent--and can be shaken up if it is not. The question is whether our political leadership is strong and able enough. And the buck stops with the president.

Does the president really believe, as he said at his recent press conference with Prime Minister Blair, that the Iraq war's greatest mistake was Abu Ghraib? Or was this just a way of ducking the question? After all, the damage done to the war effort by Abu Ghraib pales beside the damage done by not having enough troops in theater, by refusing to send additional troops, by wasting a year before beginning seriously to build up the Iraqi army, by the April 2004 aborted battle for Falluja, and the like.

Obviously the president wasn't going to say this. Fine. But does he understand it? Perhaps. It is heartening that he met last week, in private, with a group of diverse experts on Iraq, in order to get fresh points of view about the situation there. The president understands that this war isn't going to be won unless he ensures that it gets won. It won't get won if the president doesn't aggressively defend the honor of our soldiers and Marines. And it won't get won if we succumb to liberal hand-wringing, or indulge in conservative happy talk. But it must get won. Winning the wars this nation commits to is also the way we keep our honor clean.

ABU MUSAB AL-ZARQAWI

Death of a Monster

Weekly Standard

By Dan Darling

6/8

AS INFORMATION CONCERNING HIS DEMISE continues to surface, the death of Abu Musab Zarqawi marks the end of one of the most accomplished mass murderers in the modern history of terrorism. According to the claims of responsibility released by his own group in Iraq, Zarqawi and his followers have conservatively murdered thousands of Iraq civilians and hundreds of coalition soldiers--in addition to perpetrating the February 2006 bombing of the al-Askariyyah Mosque in Samarra that instigated a wave of sectarian violence across the country.

Born Ahmed Fadel Nazal al-Khalayleh, Zarqawi was first identified as a major threat during a meeting of the German-Atlantic Society in Berlin in the fall of 2002. There, Hans-Josef Beth, the head of Germany's International Terrorism Department of the Security Service, warned that Zarqawi was an al Qaeda leader who "has experience with poisonous chemicals and biological weapons." Even before the beginning of the Iraqi insurgency, the State Department's 2002 Patterns of Global Terrorism report already marked of the scope of his murderous ambitions, noting that "In the past year, al-Qaida operatives in northern Iraq concocted suspect chemicals under the direction of senior al-Qaida associate Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi and tried to smuggle them into Russia, Western Europe, and the United States for terrorist operations."

The nature and extent of Zarqawi's activities inside Iraq prior to the invasion have always been the subject of debate, though it is generally agreed that he spent a considerable amount of time in northern Iraq working with the al Qaeda associate group Ansar al-Islam.

In February 2003, then-Secretary of State Collin Powell told the U.N. Security Council that Zarqawi, was "an associated and collaborator of Osama bin Laden and his Al Qaida lieutenants" and had "traveled to Baghdad in May 2002 for medical treatment." "During this stay," Powell noted, "nearly two dozen extremists converged on Baghdad and established a base of operations there." These claims have been disputed by critics, including many who have argued (erroneously) that the 9/11 Commission report debunks any past claims of Iraqi collaboration with al Qaeda (in fact, the report never mentions Zarqawi).

Yet according to the text of a Senate Select Intelligence Committee report, imprisoned al Qaeda leader Abu Zubaydah "indicated that he had heard that an important al-Qaida associate, Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi . . . had good relationships with Iraqi intelligence." In its discussion of Zarqawi's stay in Baghdad, the report noted that "As indicated in Iraqi Support for Terrorism, the Iraqi regime was, at a minimum, aware of al-Zarqawi's presence in Baghdad in 2002 because a foreign government service passed [redacted] information regarding his whereabouts to Iraqi authorities in June 2002" and that "The HUMINT [Human Intelligence] reporting indicated that the Iraqi regime certainly knew that al-Zarqawi was in Baghdad." As recently as May 2006, Defense Secretary Rumsfeld stated that "Zarqawi was in Baghdad during the pre-war period. That is a fact."

ZARQAWI'S EXACT RELATIONSHIP with Osama bin Laden has also been debated, with war critics alleging that the two were rivals before the Iraq war brought them together. Yet this theory ignores a great deal of evidence, such as a September 2003 Washington Post report that Zarqawi met with al Qaeda military chief Saif al-Adel in eastern Iran more than a month before the invasion to begin laying the groundwork for the Iraqi insurgency. Zarqawi's 2004 letter to the al Qaeda leadership describes Osama bin Laden and his deputy Ayman al-Zawahiri as "gracious brothers . . . leaders, guides, and symbolic figures of jihad and battle" and Shadi Abdallah, the man whose testimony in German court is often cited by critics, would later note that Zarqawi "could do nothing without the prior agreement of the cleric Abu Qatada," a U.K.-based Islamist who has long regarded as bin Laden's top representative in Europe.

Since the fall of Saddam Hussein, Zarqawi has emerged as the primary terrorist opponent of the United States and its allies as well as the most effective insurgent commander. His strategy has been to instigate a sectarian civil war aimed more at destroying the country than in overthrowing its government. Not content simply to kill Iraqis in order to satisfy his murderous impulses, Zarqawi and his organization have been linked to dozens of attempted terrorist attacks in the Middle East and Europe, including a thwarted chemical attack in his native homeland of Jordan in April 2004. His influence was felt as far as the recent arrests in Canada, where the Mississauga News reported that "Zarqawi's outfit passe[d] on bomb-making manuals, advice on how to sustain terror cells and even ways to use credit card fraud to hack into vital Internet sites" to the accused terror suspects. Had he survived, Zarqawi might well have followed through on the strategy recommended to him by al Qaeda second-in-command Ayman al-Zawahiri, which called upon him to expand his war to encompass the rest of the Middle East.

Zarqawi's death is unlikely to prove the immediate end of either al Qaeda in Iraq or the Iraqi insurgency, as Zarqawi was, by his own account, only a servant or representative of al Qaeda's international terrorist organization. Yet it must be noted that Zarqawi was also a monster of unspeakable proportions. The United States, its coalition allies, and the new Iraqi government have much to be thankful for in bringing an end to this mass murderer's career.

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A Crucial Moment

National Review

By Andrew C. McCarthy

6/8

Simply stated, the killing of Abu Musab Zarqawi by U.S. forces in Iraq is more vital to ultimate success in the war on terror than would be snuffing out any other terrorist alive right now. Period.

For close to five years, al Qaeda's top leaders, Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri, have been reduced to hurling video threats rather than bombs as they scurry from place to place trying to stay one step ahead of the grim reaper. In vivid contrast, Zarqawi, the Jordanian-born emir of "al Qaeda in Mesopotamia," has been a vibrant, hands-on leader.

As he committed atrocity after atrocity, for years and seemingly with impunity, Zarqawi became a mythic figure in a part of the world where mythology has vastly more cachet than reality. His exploits stoked the triumphalism of the bin Laden narrative, which unfolds an Islam so transcendent it drives infidel superpowers out of Lebanon, Afghanistan, and Somalia, annihilates their embassies and naval destroyers, and reaches even into their territories to murder unbelievers and destroy the symbols of their earthly might.

In short, he embodied for jihadists--and, more consequentially, for the untold thousands sympathetic to jihadism but on the fence about whether to cross over into active terrorism--the conceit that if they were committed enough, and ruthless enough, they could win.

Worse, he seemed at times to be succeeding in his strategy to foment sectarian warfare in Iraq between Sunnis and Shiites--a strategy which, in its audacity, even gave pause to Zawahiri, al Qaeda's top strategist. Indeed, it may even have strained the Sunni terror network's key but uneasy alliances with Shiite Iran and Hezbollah (although how much the latter actually disapproved of Zarqawi as long as his tactics were destabilizing Iraq and thus undermining America is difficult to say--particularly given our dearth of reliable intelligence in the region).

Hopefully, Zarqawi's demise is a clarifying event in the United States--for the administration, the Congress, and--hope against hope--the media. This was the real American military in action, in all its effectiveness, doing what the American people sent it to do despite often impossibly difficult circumstances: namely, eliminate nondescript terrorists who strike in stealth then weave themselves back into the civilian population.

It is a mission our brave men and women--again, the real American military--perform brilliantly, day in and day out, despite lethal danger to themselves and immense pressure to perform flawlessly. Yet, what we hear about back home is Abu Ghraib. What we hear about is Haditha--as to which the anti-war champion of the current fifteen minutes, Congressman Jack Murtha, is poised to accord our Marines a lot less due process than he and other members are extending to their radioactive colleague, Rep. William Jefferson.

What we might want to remember from time to time is that ever since we unleashed our forces, no American city has had to bury thousands of its dead or gaze upon barren craters where skyscrapers once stood.

Let's further pray that the administration heeds what is sure to be the very strong public approval of Zarqawi's killing, apparently along with other terrorists, notwithstanding that it came in an air strike--i.e., an attack of the kind which always carries the risk of collateral casualties.

No one wants to see innocents harmed. But we are at war--something often noted but never quite remembered. Innocents are in peril, both here and in Iraq (and elsewhere) as long as jihadists thrive.

The American people vigorously support, and have always vigorously supported, the deployment of our military for the purpose of capturing and killing terrorists in promotion of American national security--taking the battle to enemy so we don't

need to fight them here. That is the Iraq mission we have always stood behind-- more than finding Saddam's WMD, a lot more than grand democracy-building initiatives, and a whole lot more than crafting new governments that establish Islam as the state religion.

Of course we must support the long-term goals of the democracy project. But we must be realistic that they are long-term goals. Democracy in the Islamic world is a matter of cultural upheaval over years, not just a few elections. Whether the project can ultimately succeed is debatable. One thing, however, is surely indisputable: Like the U.S. national security it is intended to promote, the democracy project cannot be sustained unless the enemy is first defeated.

It was not democracy that killed Zarqawi. It was the United States military.

We began the war on terror with the clear-eyed understanding that Islamic militants cannot be reasoned with; they have to be eradicated. Winning the war on terror will require the resolve to let our forces do their job--despite occasional vilification from fair-weather allies who bask in the protection of American power while shouldering none of its burdens.

Today reminds us that we have the power to get the job done. The remaining question is whether we have the will.

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

The Short, Violent Life of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi

Atlantic

By Mary Anne Weaver

6/8

How a video-store clerk and small-time crook reinvented himself as America's nemesis in Iraq

On a cold and blustery evening in December 1989, Huthaifa Azzam, the teenage son of the legendary Jordanian-Palestinian mujahideen leader Sheikh Abdullah Azzam, went to the airport in Peshawar, Pakistan, to welcome a group of young men. All were new recruits, largely from Jordan, and they had come to fight in a fratricidal civil war in neighboring Afghanistan—an outgrowth of the CIA-financed jihad of the 1980s against the Soviet occupation there.

The men were scruffy, Huthaifa mused as he greeted them, and seemed hardly in battle-ready form. Some had just been released from prison; others were professors and sheikhs. None of them would prove worth remembering—except for a relatively short, squat man named Ahmad Fadhil Nazzal al-Khalaylah.

He would later rename himself Abu Musab al-Zarqawi.

Once one of the most wanted men in the world, for whose arrest the United States offered a \$25 million reward, al-Zarqawi was a notoriously enigmatic figure—a man who was everywhere yet nowhere. I went to Jordan earlier this year, three months

before he was killed by a U.S. airstrike in early June, to find out who he really was, and to try to understand the role he was playing in the anti-American insurgency in Iraq. I also hoped to get a sense of how his generation—the foreign fighters now waging jihad in Iraq—compare with the foreign fighters who twenty years ago waged jihad in Afghanistan.

Huthaifa Azzam, whom I first met twenty years ago in Peshawar, bridges both worlds. He first went into battle at the age of fifteen, fighting against the Soviets in Afghanistan with his father and Osama bin Laden (to whom his father was a spiritual mentor); three years later, on that December night at the Peshawar airport, he met al-Zarqawi for the first time. The two Azzams and bin Laden had fought against the Soviets in the early days of the jihad; al-Zarqawi would fight in the war's second phase, after the Soviets had pulled out. Both Huthaifa Azzam and al-Zarqawi would eventually leave Afghanistan to pursue two very different lives, but their paths would once again cross on the battlefields of jihad in Iraq, after the U.S. invasion of 2003.

A self-described jihadist—one who believes in struggle, or, more loosely, holy war—Azzam now lives in the Jordanian capital, Amman, where he is at work on a doctorate in classical Arabic literature, but he moves routinely between Jordan and Iraq. Seeing him again for the first time since he was a teenager, I was struck, as we chatted in a friend's drawing room, by how little he resembled the conventional image of a jihadist. He wore jeans, a light denim jacket, and an open-necked shirt, and his light-brown beard was neatly trimmed.

I asked Azzam if he knew who was funding al-Zarqawi's activities in Iraq.

He thought for a moment, and then replied without answering, "At the time of jihad, you can get vast amounts of money with a simple telephone call. I myself once collected three million dollars, which my father had arranged with a single call."

"A bank transfer?" I asked.

"No. I collected it on my motorbike.

"I was in Syria when the war in Iraq began," he went on. "People were arriving in droves; everyone wanted to go to Iraq to fight the Americans. I remember one guy who came and said he was too old to fight, but he gave the recruiters \$200,000 in cash. 'Give it to the mujahideen,' was all he said."

He then told me about a young boy he had met in the early days of the war.

"He was from Saudi Arabia and had just turned thirteen. I noticed him in the crowd at a recruiting center near the Syrian-Iraqi frontier. People would come and register in the morning, then cross the border in the afternoon by bus. I first saw him at the registration desk. The recruiters refused to take him because he was so young, and he started to cry. I went back later in the day, and this same small guy had sneaked aboard the bus. When they discovered him, he started to shout Allahu Akhbar!—'God is most great!' They carried him off. He had \$12,000 in his pocket—expense money his family had given him before he set off. 'Take it all,' he pleaded. 'Please, just let me do jihad.'"

Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, barely forty and barely literate, a Bedouin from the Bani Hassan tribe, was until recently almost unknown outside his native Jordan. Then, on

February 5, 2003, Secretary of State Colin Powell catapulted him onto the world stage. In his address to the United Nations making the case for war in Iraq, Powell identified al-Zarqawi—mistakenly, as it turned out—as the crucial link between al-Qaeda and Saddam Hussein's regime. Subsequently, al-Zarqawi became a leading figure in the insurgency in Iraq—and in November of last year, he also brought his jihadist revolution back home, as the architect of three lethal hotel bombings in Amman. His notoriety grew with every atrocity he perpetrated, yet Western and Middle Eastern intelligence officials remained bedeviled by a simple question: Who was he? Was he al-Qaeda's point man in Iraq, as the Bush administration argued repeatedly? Or was he, as a retired Israeli intelligence official told me not long ago, a staunch rival of bin Laden's, whose importance the United States exaggerated in order to validate a link between al-Qaeda and pre-war Iraq, and to put a non-Iraqi face on a complex insurgency?

Early one morning, with a driver who would also serve as my interpreter, I set out from my hotel in Amman for the forty-five-minute drive to Zarqa—the industrial city where, in October 1966, al-Zarqawi was born into a large family, and from which he took his new name. As we sped along the highway, I tried to recall the often contradictory descriptions I had heard of the man. U.S. officials, for example, had often reported that in 2002, al-Zarqawi had had one of his legs amputated in Baghdad, a claim presumably meant to substantiate a link between al-Zarqawi and Saddam Hussein's regime. But he was later seen walking in a videotape, clearly in possession of both his legs. Some Bush administration officials called him a Jordanian-Palestinian, but in fact he came from one of the Middle East's most influential Bedouin tribes. He was often reported dead, only to rise again. In recent years, some even suggested that he didn't exist at all. The man was hard to distinguish from the myth.

One thing that brought me to Jordan was a desire to find out as much as possible about al-Zarqawi's relationship with Osama bin Laden. The two men had little in common: bin Laden, like most of his inner circle, is a university graduate from an influential family; al-Zarqawi, like many who follow him, was from an anonymous family (even though they are members of a significant tribe) and an anonymous town—a man who was fired from a job as a video-store clerk and whose background included street gangs and, according to Jordanian intelligence officials, prison for sexual assault. He was a ruthless self-promoter who, U.S. officials claim, killed or wounded thousands of people in the past three years—in suicide bombings, mass executions, and beheadings that have been videotaped. He developed a mythic aura of invulnerability. But he was not the terrorist mastermind that he was often claimed to be.

Zarqa is a shambolic industrial city of some 850,000 people, a sprawl of factories, open fields, and dust. Twenty-five miles northeast of Amman, it is Jordan's third-largest city, and one of its most militant. For years it has been a magnet for Islamic activists. Along with the cities of Irbid and Salt, it has sent the largest number of Jordanian volunteers to fight abroad, first in Afghanistan and now in Iraq. Al-Zarqawi was born and raised in the al-Masoum neighborhood of Zarqa's old city, which sprawls somewhat haphazardly into the al-Ruseifah Palestinian refugee camp. (More than 60 percent of Jordan's 5.9 million inhabitants are Palestinian, as are some 80 percent of the inhabitants of old Zarqa.) When we entered the al-Masoum neighborhood, the first thing that struck me was the sight of three "Afghan Arabs," as the Arab veterans of the jihad in Afghanistan are called. They were easily identifiable by the shalwar kameezes they wore—the long shirts and bloused trousers

that are Afghanistan's national dress—and by their long, unkempt beards. Squatting outside a tiny neighborhood shop, they paid us little heed.

Until his death, al-Zarqawi kept a home on a quiet lane in Zarqa. It was indistinguishable from its neighbors—a two-story white stucco building surrounded by a whitewashed wall. The house was empty, a neighbor told us; al-Zarqawi's sisters, who still live in Zarqa, would come by to look after it. At one point I glanced up at a window, which was slightly ajar. Someone abruptly slammed it shut.

I learned that the first of al-Zarqawi's two wives had lived in the house until recently. She was his cousin, whom he had married when he was twenty-two. They had four children, two boys and two girls. But not long before my visit, al-Zarqawi had sent an unknown man to drive them across the border to be with him in Iraq. His second wife, a Jordanian-Palestinian whom he had married in Afghanistan, and with whom he has a son, was reported to be with him in Iraq as well. Al-Zarqawi's mother, Omm Sayel, whom he adored—and who had traveled to Peshawar with him when he joined the jihad—died of leukemia in 2004; although he was the most wanted man in Jordan at the time of her death, al-Zarqawi returned to Zarqa in disguise to attend her funeral.

As I wandered with my driver around the al-Masoum neighborhood—visiting the al-Falah mosque, a tiny green-latticed structure where al-Zarqawi had been “returned” to Islam; searching for the cemetery that had been his favorite childhood playground (which we never found); and talking to al-Zarqawi's neighbors and friends—it became clear to me that although government officials in Amman had said that al-Zarqawi's popularity had plummeted since he had bombed the hotels there, Zarqa, at least, still appeared to be his town. We met three little boys riding their bicycles down an empty lane. When we asked for directions to al-Zarqawi's house, they told us where to go—and then, with large grins on their small faces, they flashed the victory sign. An old man who ran a local grocery looked at us knowingly when we walked in. “You're here for Zarqawi,” he said, a statement of fact rather than a question. When we responded that we were, he insisted on giving us free soft drinks and potato chips.

Everyone I spoke with readily acknowledged that as a teenager al-Zarqawi had been a bully and a thug, a bootlegger and a heavy drinker, and even, allegedly, a pimp in Zarqa's underworld. He was disruptive, constantly involved in brawls. When he was fifteen (according to his police record, about which I had been briefed in Amman), he participated in a robbery of a relative's home, during which the relative was killed. Two years later, a year shy of graduation, he had dropped out of school. Then, in 1989, at the age of twenty-three, he traveled to Afghanistan.

It was the first time he had ever been out of Jordan, and for him it changed everything.

Salah al-Hami, a Jordanian of Palestinian descent, was al-Zarqawi's brother-in-law and one of his closest friends. We met him outside the garden of his Zarqa home. Dressed in a long blue robe, and with a red-and-white-checkered kaffiyeh hanging loosely from his head, he sported a full Islamist beard. He was polite but refused to be interviewed; after every interview he'd given, he said, he'd been arrested. But being arrested wasn't what bothered him most. What bothered him was that he had been misquoted repeatedly. As a journalist himself, he was fed up.

I told him that I simply wanted to verify a few dates and facts, and was interested in talking to him not about Iraq but about Afghanistan. He looked at me skeptically but agreed to chat as we stood at his garden gate. He and al-Zarqawi had met in Afghanistan, he said, during al-Zarqawi's first stay there, from 1989 to 1993. Al-Zarqawi was based initially in the border town of Khost, which, after both the Americans and the Soviets had left Afghanistan, was the site of intense and heavily contested battles between the mujahideen and the pro-Soviet Najibullah regime. At the beginning, al-Hami continued, al-Zarqawi had not been a fighter but had tried his hand at being a journalist. He had worked as a reporter for a small jihadist magazine, Al-Bonian al Marsous, while al-Hami was a correspondent for Al-Jihad magazine, which the mujahideen published in Peshawar. But then one day al-Hami stepped on a land mine and lost one of his legs.

It was during al-Zarqawi's visits to the hospital that he and al-Hami became close friends. I didn't ask al-Hami any personal questions, but I had been told earlier by another of al-Zarqawi's friends that one day in the hospital, al-Hami had spoken of the impossibility of ever having a family or a wife. "A one-legged man?" al-Hami reportedly said to al-Zarqawi. "Who would want to marry him?" In response al-Zarqawi offered him the hand of one of his sisters, and al-Hami agreed. So did the sister, and the two were married in Peshawar, in a lavish ceremony presided over by al-Zarqawi, whose father had died when he was young. The video of the reception was the only authenticated footage of al-Zarqawi ever publicly seen—until this April, when, for the first time, al-Zarqawi released a videotape of himself.

Al-Hami moved to Zarqa when he returned from Afghanistan. For a number of years now he has looked after al-Zarqawi's family, as well as his own, while his brother-in-law traveled on a path that took him to prison, back to Afghanistan, then to Iran, northern Kurdistan, and, finally, Iraq.

"If you want to understand who Zarqawi is," a former Jordanian intelligence official had told me earlier, "you've got to understand the four major turning points in his life: his first trip to Afghanistan; then the prison years [from 1993 to 1999]; then his return to Afghanistan, when he really came into his own; and then Iraq." He thought for a moment. "And, of course, the creativity of the Americans."

"He was an ordinary guy, an ordinary fighter, and didn't really distinguish himself," Huthaifa Azzam said of al-Zarqawi's first time in Afghanistan. "He was a quiet guy who didn't talk much. But he was brave. Zarqawi doesn't know the meaning of fear. He's been wounded five or six times in Afghanistan and Iraq. He seems to intentionally place himself in the middle of the most dangerous situations. He fought in the battles of Khost and Kardez and, in April 1992, witnessed the liberation of Kabul by the mujahideen. A lot of Arabs were great commanders during those years. Zarqawi was not. He also wasn't very religious during that time. In fact, he'd only 'returned' to Islam three months before coming to Afghanistan. It was the Tablighi Jamaat [a proselytizing missionary group spread across the Muslim world] who convinced him—he had thirty-seven criminal cases against him by then—that it was time to cleanse himself."

A Jordanian counterterrorism official expanded on al-Zarqawi's time in Afghanistan for me. "His second time in Afghanistan was far more important than the first. But the first was significant in two ways. Zarqawi was young and impressionable; he'd never been out of Jordan before, and now, for the first time, he was interacting with doctrinaire Islamists from across the Muslim world, most of them brought to

Afghanistan by the CIA. It was also his first exposure to al-Qaeda. He didn't meet bin Laden, of course, but he trained in one of his and Abdullah Azzam's camps: the Sada camp near the Afghan border inside Pakistan. He trained under Abu Hafis al-Masri." (The reference was to the nom de guerre of Mohammed Atef, an Egyptian who was bin Laden's military chief and, until he was killed in an American air strike in Afghanistan in November 2001, the No. 3 official in al-Qaeda.)

Abu Muntassir Bilal Muhammad is another jihadist who spent time fighting in Afghanistan and who would later become one of the co-founders of al-Zarqawi's first militant Islamist group. "Zarqawi arrived in Afghanistan as a zero," he told me, "a man with no career, just floundering about. He trained and fought and he came back to Jordan with ambitions and dreams: to carry the ideology of jihad. His first ambition was to reform Jordan, to set up an Islamist state. And there was a cachet involved in fighting in the jihad. Zarqawi returned to Jordan with newfound respect. It's not so much what Zarqawi did in the jihad—it's what the jihad did for him."

With an eye to the future, al-Zarqawi also used the jihad years to begin the process of cultivating friendships that would eventually lead to the formation of an international support network for his activities. "Particularly when he was in Khost, his primary friendships were with the Saudi fighters and others from the Gulf," Huthaifa Azzam told me. "Some of them were millionaires. There were even a couple of billionaires."

But perhaps as important as anything else, it was in Afghanistan that al-Zarqawi was introduced to Sheikh Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi (whose real name is Isam Muhammad Tahir al-Barqawi), a revered and militant Salafist cleric who had moved to Zarqa following the mass expulsion of Palestinians from Kuwait in the aftermath of the Gulf War. The Salafiya movement originated in Egypt, at the end of the nineteenth century, as a modernist Sunni reform movement, the aim of which was to let the Muslim world rise to the challenges posed by Western science and political thought. But since the 1920s, it has evolved into a severely puritanical school of absolutist thought that is markedly anti-Western and based on a literal interpretation of the Koran. Today's most radical Salafists regard any departure from their own rigid principles of Islam to be heretical; their particular hatred of Shiites—who broke with the Sunnis in 632 A.D. over the question of succession to the Prophet Muhammad, and who now constitute the majority in Iran and Iraq—is visceral. Over the years, al-Maqdisi embraced the most extreme school of Salafism, closely akin to the puritanical Wahhabism of Saudi Arabia, and in the early 1980s he published *The Creed of Abraham*, the single most important source of teachings for Salafist movements around the world. Al-Maqdisi would become al-Zarqawi's ideological mentor and most profound influence.

"It's not surprising that Zarqawi embraced Salafism," I was told by Jarret Brachman, the research director of the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point. "Jihadi Salafism is black and white—and so is everything that Zarqawi's ever done. When he met al-Maqdisi, he was drifting, trying to find an outlet, and very impressionable. His religious grounding, until then, was largely dependent upon whose influence he was under at the time. And since his father had died when he was young, he'd been seeking a father figure. Al-Maqdisi served both needs."

Al-Zarqawi and al-Maqdisi left Afghanistan in 1993 and returned to Jordan. They found it much changed. In their absence the Jordanians and the Israelis had begun negotiations that would lead to the signing of a peace treaty in 1994; the

Palestinians had signed the Oslo Accords of 1993; and the Iraqis had lost the Gulf War. Unemployment was up sharply, the result of a privatization drive agreed to with the International Monetary Fund, and Jordanians were frustrated and angry. The Muslim Brotherhood—the kingdom’s only viable opposition political force, which had agreed to support King Hussein in exchange for being allowed to participate in public and parliamentary life—appeared unable to cope with the rising disaffection. Small underground Islamist groups had therefore begun to appear, composed largely of men who had fought in the Afghan jihad, and who were guided by the increasingly loud voices of militant clerics who felt the Muslim Brotherhood had been co-opted by the state.

After the two men returned home, al-Maqdisi toured the kingdom, preaching and recruiting, and al-Zarqawi sought out Abu Muntassir, who had already acquired a standing among Islamic militants in Jordan. “We talked a lot, over a couple of days,” Abu Muntassir told me. “He was still pretty much a novice, but very willing, very able, and keen to learn about Islam. I was teaching geography at the time in a government school, so it was easy for me to teach Islam as well. After some time, Zarqawi asked me to work with him in an Islamic group; al-Maqdisi was already on board. The idea was there, but it had no leadership and no name. First we called it al-Tawhid, then changed the name to Bayat al-Imam [Allegiance to the Imam]. We were small but enthusiastic—a dozen or so men. Our primary objective, of course, was to overthrow the monarchy and establish an Islamic government.”

Despite their enthusiasm, al-Zarqawi, al-Maqdisi, and Abu Muntassir did not appear to be natural revolutionaries. Their first operation was in Zarqa, in 1993, a former Jordanian intelligence official told me, when al-Zarqawi dispatched one of their men to a local cinema with orders to blow it up because it was showing pornographic films. But the hapless would-be bomber apparently got so distracted by what was happening on the screen that he forgot about his bomb. It exploded and blew off his legs.

In another botched operation, al-Maqdisi (according to court testimony that he denied) gave al-Zarqawi seven grenades he had smuggled into Jordan, and al-Zarqawi hid them in the cellar of his family’s home. Al-Maqdisi was already under surveillance by Jordan’s intelligence service by that time, because of his growing popularity. The grenades were quickly discovered, and the two men, along with a number of their followers, found themselves for the first time before a state security court. Al-Zarqawi told the court that he had found the grenades while walking down the street. The judges were not amused. They convicted him and al-Maqdisi of possessing illegal weapons and belonging to a banned organization. In 1994, al-Zarqawi was sentenced to fifteen years in prison. He would flourish there.

Swaqa prison sits on the southern desert’s edge, sixty miles south of Amman, and its political prisoners, both Islamist and secular, are housed in four wings. Al-Zarqawi embraced prison life in the extreme—as he appears to have embraced everything. According to fellow inmates of his with whom I spoke, his primary obsessions were recruiting other prisoners to his cause, building his body, and, under the tutelage of al-Maqdisi, memorizing the 6,236 verses of the Koran. He was stern, tough, and unrelenting on anything that he considered to be an infraction of his rules, yet he was often seen in the prison courtyard crying as he read the Koran.

He was fastidious about his appearance in prison—his beard and moustache were always cosmetically groomed—and he wore only Afghan dress: the shalwar kameez

and a rolled-brim, woolen Pashtun cap. One former inmate who served time with him told me that al-Zarqawi sauntered through the prison ward like a “peacock.” Islamists flocked to him. He attracted recruits; some joined him out of fascination, others out of curiosity, and still others out of fear. In a short time, he had organized prison life at Swaqa like a gang leader.

“Zarqawi was the muscle, and al-Maqdisi the thinker,” Abdullah Abu Rumman, a journalist and editor who had been in prison with al-Zarqawi, told me one morning over tea. (Abu Rumman had been held for three months in 1996, for a series of articles he wrote that were considered unflattering toward King Hussein.) “Zarqawi basically controlled the prison ward,” Abu Rumman went on. “He decided who would cook, who would do the laundry, who would lead the readings of the Koran. He was extremely protective of his followers, and extremely tough with prisoners outside his group. He didn’t trust them. He considered them infidels.”

There were also confrontations and altercations with prison officials and guards. Whether al-Zarqawi was ever tortured is a matter of dispute: some of his followers say he was; Jordanian government officials, perhaps predictably, say he was not.

When Abu Rumman entered Swaqa, al-Zarqawi was in isolation following a prison brawl. “It was quite extraordinary,” Abu Rumman said. “My first glimpse of Zarqawi was when he was released. He returned to the ward as a hero surrounded by his own bodyguards. Everyone began to shout: Allahu Akhbar! By that time Zarqawi was already called the ‘emir,’ or ‘prince.’ He had an uncanny ability to control, almost to hypnotize; he could order his followers to do things just by moving his eyes.”

Al-Zarqawi controlled not only his followers but also the ward’s television sets. No one could really watch them, however, since he had covered them with black cloth to prevent the display of female forms. All the inmates could do was listen—and only to the evening news at eight o’clock. “Zarqawi and his followers had scant interest in political affairs, except for what was happening in Algeria and Afghanistan,” Abu Rumman said. “At the pre-arranged hour, they’d all rush into the television room. When shouts of ‘Allahu Akhbar!’ reverberated through the ward, we all knew that the Taliban was meeting with success.”

Al-Zarqawi and al-Maqdisi’s Bayat al-Imam continued to grow, both inside prison and in Zarqa, Irbid, and Salt. Al-Zarqawi used his Bedouin credentials to good effect, as his own profile began to ascend. His Bani Hassan tribe is one of the Middle East’s most prominent, and its tribal lands spill across the borders dividing Jordan, Syria, and Iraq. In Jordan, many of its members hold high-level positions in the government, the army, and the intelligence service. As a result, many of the prisoners, and many of Swaqa’s guards, deferred to al-Zarqawi. Al-Maqdisi, a Palestinian, was also accorded special treatment, but largely as a result of his links to al-Zarqawi and the Bani Hassan. Between mentor and pupil, the roles had subtly begun to shift inside the prison walls.

As al-Zarqawi recruited, al-Maqdisi preached, and using the Internet, they broadcast their message of jihad across three continents. Sheikh Abu Qatada, a Palestinian cleric who is one of Salafism’s leading ideologues, was also one of al-Maqdisi’s closest friends. The two men had been together in Kuwait, then in Zarqa, then Afghanistan. Abu Qatada, after leaving Afghanistan, had moved to London (where he is currently under arrest, awaiting possible deportation to Jordan). Now al-Maqdisi’s religious tracts were smuggled out of Swaqa by prisoners’ wives and mothers, with

help from sympathetic prison guards, and they were sent on to Abu Qatada, who posted them on the Web sites of Salafists and jihadists throughout Europe, the Middle East, and the Persian Gulf.

Al-Zarqawi's own religious views became increasingly severe, as did his intolerance of anyone he believed to be an infidel. Al-Maqqdisi sometimes angrily disagreed with him. (It was the first portent of what lay ahead. Al-Zarqawi began to eclipse his mentor in prison, and would continue to do so over the coming years, but their final, and public, break did not occur until November 2005, when, on Al-Jazeera, al-Maqqdisi criticized his former protégé for the hotel bombings in Amman.) Nevertheless, despite their prison disagreements, al-Maqqdisi, from time to time, permitted al-Zarqawi to draft his own religious tracts. Abu Muntassir (who would also later break with al-Zarqawi) was his editor. Al-Zarqawi was "a terrible writer," he told me, "and didn't really understand the Koran. He had learned it by rote." Al-Zarqawi never learned to write a fatwa, Abu Muntassir said, and as a result had to set up his own fatwa committee in Iraq.

In 1998, three or four of al-Zarqawi's tracts were posted on the Internet, after heavy editing. Soon they came to the attention of Osama bin Laden, in Afghanistan. It was the first time he had ever heard of al-Zarqawi.

In May of the following year, Jordan's King Abdullah II—newly enthroned after the death of his father, King Hussein—declared a general amnesty, and al-Zarqawi was released from Swaqa. He had made effective use of his time there. As he had done nearly a decade before—when he befriended wealthy Saudi jihadists in Khost—he had expanded his reach and his appeal during his prison years. Among the fellow inmates he had converted to Salafism and brought into the Bayat al-Imam were a substantial number of prisoners from Iraq.

After returning for a few months to Zarqa, al-Zarqawi left again and traveled to Pakistan. He may or may not have known that Jordan was about to declare him a suspect in a series of foiled terrorist attacks intended for New Year's Eve of 1999. The plan, which became known as the "Millennium Plot," involved the bombing of Christian landmarks and other tourist sites, along with the Radisson Hotel in Amman. Had it succeeded, it would have been al-Zarqawi's first involvement in a major terrorist attack.

Whatever the case, al-Zarqawi planned ahead before he left for Pakistan. He arrived bearing a letter of introduction from Abu Kutaiba al-Urduni, one of Jordan's most significant leaders during the jihad in Afghanistan. Al-Urduni had been a key deputy to—and the chief recruiter inside Jordan for—Sheikh Abdullah Azzam, Huthaifa Azzam's father. (Having worked for years in Peshawar as the leader of the Service Office, or the Maktab al-Khidmat, the sheikh had become the pivotal figure in the Pan-Islamic recruitment of volunteers for the jihad.) Al-Urduni's letter was the first endorsement that al-Zarqawi had received from such a senior figure—and the letter was addressed to Osama bin Laden.

In December 1999, al-Zarqawi crossed the border into Afghanistan, and later that month he and bin Laden met at the Government Guest House in the southern city of Kandahar, the de facto capital of the ruling Taliban. As they sat facing each other across the receiving room, a former Israeli intelligence official told me, "it was loathing at first sight."

According to several different accounts of the meeting, bin Laden distrusted and disliked al-Zarqawi immediately. He suspected that the group of Jordanian prisoners with whom al-Zarqawi had been granted amnesty earlier in the year had been infiltrated by Jordanian intelligence; something similar had occurred not long before with a Jordanian jihadist cell that had come to Afghanistan. Bin Laden also disliked al-Zarqawi's swagger and the green tattoos on his left hand, which he reportedly considered un-Islamic. Al-Zarqawi came across to bin Laden as aggressively ambitious, abrasive, and overbearing. His hatred of Shiites also seemed to bin Laden to be potentially divisive—which, of course, it was. (Bin Laden's mother, to whom he remains close, is a Shiite, from the Alawites of Syria.)

Al-Zarqawi would not recant, even in the presence of the legendary head of al-Qaeda. "Shiites should be executed," he reportedly declared. He also took exception to bin Laden's providing Arab fighters to the Taliban, the fundamentalist student militia that, although now in power, was still battling the Northern Alliance, which controlled some 10 percent of Afghanistan. Muslim killing Muslim was un-Islamic, al-Zarqawi is reported to have said.

Unaccustomed to such direct criticism, the leader of al-Qaeda was aghast.

Had Saif al-Adel—now bin Laden's military chief—not intervened, history might be written very differently.

A former Egyptian army colonel who had trained in special operations, al-Adel was then al-Qaeda's chief of security and a prominent voice in an emerging debate gripping the militant Islamist world. Who should the primary target be—the "near enemy" (the Muslim world's "un-Islamic" regimes) or the "far enemy" (primarily Israel and the United States)? Al-Zarqawi was a near-enemy advocate, and although his obsession remained the overthrow of the Jordanian monarchy, he had expanded his horizons slightly during his prison years and had now begun to focus on the area known as al-Sham, or the Levant, which includes Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and historic Palestine. As an Egyptian who had attempted to overthrow his own country's army-backed regime, al-Adel saw merit in al-Zarqawi's views. Thus, after a good deal of debate within al-Qaeda, it was agreed that al-Zarqawi would be given \$5,000 or so in "seed money" to set up his own training camp outside the western Afghan city of Herat, near the Iranian border. It was about as far away as he could be from bin Laden.

Saif al-Adel was designated the middleman.

In early 2000, with a dozen or so followers who had arrived from Peshawar and Amman, al-Zarqawi set out for the western desert encircling Herat. His goal: to build an army that he could export to anywhere in the world. Al-Adel paid monthly visits to al-Zarqawi's training camp; later, on his Web site, he would write that he was amazed at what he saw there. The number of al-Zarqawi's fighters multiplied from dozens to hundreds during the following year, and by the time the forces evacuated their camp, prior to the U.S. air strikes of October 2001, the fighters and their families numbered some 2,000 to 3,000. According to al-Adel, the wives of al-Zarqawi's followers served lavish Levantine cuisine in the camp.

It was in Herat that al-Zarqawi formed the militant organization Jund al-Sham, or Soldiers of the Levant. His key operational lieutenants were mainly Syrians—most of whom had fought in the Afghan jihad, and many of whom belonged to their country's

banned Muslim Brotherhood. The Brotherhood's exiled leadership, which is largely based in Europe, was immensely important in recruiting for the Herat camp, although whether it also supplied funds remains under debate. What is clear, however, is that al-Zarqawi's closest aide, a Syrian from the city of Hama named Sulayman Khalid Darwish—or Abu al-Ghadiyah—was considered to be, until his death last summer on the Iraqi-Syrian frontier, one of al-Zarqawi's most likely successors.

I asked a high-level Jordanian intelligence official how important the Herat camp was.

"For Zarqawi, it was the turning point," he replied. "Herat was the beginning of what he is now. He had command responsibilities for the first time; he had a battle plan. And even though he and bin Laden never got on, he was important to them. Herat was the only training camp in Afghanistan that was actively recruiting volunteers specifically from the Sham. Zarqawi, for his part, is very conceited and likes to show off. In Herat, he called himself the 'Emir of Sham!'"

At least five times, in 2000 and 2001, bin Laden called al-Zarqawi to come to Kandahar and pay bayat—take an oath of allegiance—to him. Each time, al-Zarqawi refused. Under no circumstances did he want to become involved in the battle between the Northern Alliance and the Taliban. He also did not believe that either bin Laden or the Taliban was serious enough about jihad.

When the United States launched its air war inside Afghanistan, on October 7, 2001, al-Zarqawi joined forces with al-Qaeda and the Taliban for the first time. He and his Jund al-Sham fought in and around Herat and Kandahar. Al-Zarqawi was wounded in an American air strike—not in the leg, as U.S. officials claimed for two years, but in the chest, when the ceiling of the building in which he was operating collapsed on him. Neither did he join Osama bin Laden in the eastern mountains of Tora Bora, as U.S. officials have also said. Bin Laden took only his most trusted fighters to Tora Bora, and al-Zarqawi was not one of them.

In December 2001, accompanied by some 300 fighters from Jund al-Sham, al-Zarqawi left Afghanistan once again, and entered Iran.

During the next fourteen months, al-Zarqawi based himself primarily in Iran and in the autonomous area of Kurdistan, in northern Iraq, traveling from time to time to Syria and to the Ayn al-Hilwah Palestinian refugee camp in the south of Lebanon—a camp that, according to the former Jordanian intelligence official, became his main recruiting ground. More often, however, al-Zarqawi traveled to the Sunni Triangle of Iraq. He expanded his network, recruited and trained new fighters, and set up bases, safe houses, and military training camps. In Iran, he was reunited with Saif al-Adel—who encouraged him to go to Iraq and provided contacts there—and for a time, al-Zarqawi stayed at a farm belonging to the fiercely anti-American Afghan jihad leader Gulbaddin Hekmatyar. In Kurdistan he lived and worked with the separatist militant Islamist group Ansar al-Islam, ironically in an area protected as part of the "no-fly" zone imposed on Saddam Hussein by Washington.

One can only imagine how astonished al-Zarqawi must have been when Colin Powell named him as the crucial link between al-Qaeda and Saddam Hussein's regime. He was not even officially a part of al-Qaeda, and ever since he had left Afghanistan, his links had been not to Iraq but to Iran.

"We know Zarqawi better than he knows himself," the high-level Jordanian intelligence official said. "And I can assure you that he never had any links to Saddam. Iran is quite a different matter. The Iranians have a policy: they want to control Iraq. And part of this policy has been to support Zarqawi, tactically but not strategically."

"Such as?" I asked.

"In the beginning they gave him automatic weapons, uniforms, military equipment, when he was with the army of Ansar al-Islam. Now they essentially just turn a blind eye to his activities, and to those of al-Qaeda generally. The Iranians see Iraq as a fight against the Americans, and overall, they'll get rid of Zarqawi and all of his people once the Americans are out."

In the summer of 2003, three months after the American invasion, al-Zarqawi moved to the Sunni areas of Iraq. He became infamous almost at once. On August 7, he allegedly carried out a car-bomb attack at the Jordanian embassy in Baghdad. Twelve days later, he was linked to the bombing of the United Nations headquarters, in which twenty-two people died. And on August 29, in what was then the deadliest attack of the war, he engineered the killing of over a hundred people, including a revered cleric, the Ayatollah Muhammad Baqr al-Hakim, in a car bombing outside Shia Islam's holy shrine in Najaf. The suicide bomber in that attack was Yassin Jarad, from Zarqa. He was al-Zarqawi's father-in-law.

"Even then—and even more so now—Zarqawi was not the main force in the insurgency," the former Jordanian intelligence official, who has studied al-Zarqawi for a decade, told me. "To establish himself, he carried out the Muhammad Hakim operation, and the attack against the UN. Both of them gained a lot of support for him—with the tribes, with Saddam's army and other remnants of his regime. They made Zarqawi the symbol of the resistance in Iraq, but not the leader. And he never has been."

He continued, "The Americans have been patently stupid in all of this. They've blown Zarqawi so out of proportion that, of course, his prestige has grown. And as a result, sleeper cells from all over Europe are coming to join him now." He paused for a moment, then said, "Your government is creating a self-fulfilling prophecy."

Western and Israeli diplomats to whom I spoke shared this view—and this past April, The Washington Post reported on Pentagon documents that detailed a U.S. military propaganda campaign to inflate al-Zarqawi's importance. Then, the following month, the military appeared to attempt to reverse field and portray al-Zarqawi as an incompetent who could not even handle a gun. But by then his image in the Muslim world was set.

Of course, no one did more to cultivate that image than al-Zarqawi himself. He committed some of the deadliest attacks in Iraq, though they still represent only some 10 percent of the country's total number of attacks. In May 2004, he inaugurated his notorious wave of hostage beheadings; he also specialized in suicide and truck bombings of Shiite shrines and mosques, largely in Shiite neighborhoods. His primary aim was to provoke a civil war. "If we succeed in dragging [the Shia] into a sectarian war," he purportedly wrote in a letter intercepted by U.S. forces and released in February 2004, "this will awaken the sleepy Sunnis who are fearful of

destruction and death at the hands of the Shia." (The authenticity of the letter came into question almost immediately.)

Al-Zarqawi courted chaos so that Iraq would provide him another failed state to operate in after the overthrow of the Taliban in Afghanistan. He became best known for his videotaped beheadings. One after the other they appeared on jihadist Web sites, always the same. In the background was the trademark black banner of al-Zarqawi's newest group: al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad, or Monotheism and Jihad. In the foreground, a blindfolded hostage, kneeling and pleading for his life, was dressed in an orange jumpsuit resembling those worn by the detainees at Guantánamo Bay. Al-Zarqawi's first victim was a Pennsylvania engineer named Nicholas Berg. In the video, five hooded men, dressed in black, stand behind Berg. After a recitation, one of the men pulls a long knife from his shirt, steps forward, and slices off Berg's head. The U.S. military quickly announced that the executioner was al-Zarqawi himself, and although no one doubts that he planned the operation, questions soon arose: the figure seems taller than al-Zarqawi, and he uses his right hand to wield the knife. Al-Zarqawi was said to be left-handed.

Regardless of his growing notoriety in Iraq, al-Zarqawi never lost sight of his ultimate goal: the overthrow of the Jordanian monarchy. His efforts to foment unrest in Jordan included the 2002 assassination of the U.S. diplomat Lawrence Foley, and, on a far larger scale, a disrupted plot in 2004 to bomb the headquarters of the Jordanian intelligence services—a scheme that, according to Jordanian officials, would have entailed the use of trucks packed with enough chemicals and explosives to kill some 80,000 people. Once it was uncovered, al-Zarqawi immediately accepted responsibility for the plot, although he denied that chemical weapons would have been involved.

Later that year, in October 2004, after resisting for nearly five years, al-Zarqawi finally paid bayat to Osama bin Laden—but only after eight months of often stormy negotiations. After doing so he proclaimed himself to be the "Emir of al-Qaeda's Operations in the Land of Mesopotamia," a title that subordinated him to bin Laden but at the same time placed him firmly on the global stage. One explanation for this coming together of these two former antagonists was simple: al-Zarqawi profited from the al-Qaeda franchise, and bin Laden needed a presence in Iraq. Another explanation is more complex: bin Laden laid claim to al-Zarqawi in the hopes of forestalling his emergence as the single most important terrorist figure in the world, and al-Zarqawi accepted bin Laden's endorsement to augment his credibility and to strengthen his grip on the Iraqi tribes. Both explanations are true.

It was a pragmatic alliance, but tenuous from the start.

"From the beginning, Zarqawi has wanted to be independent, and he will continue to be," Oraib Rantawi, the director of the Al-Quds Center for Political Studies in Amman, said to me. "Yes, he's gained stature through this alliance, but he only swore bayat after all this time because of growing pressure from Iraqis who were members of al-Qaeda. And even then he signed with conditions—that he would maintain control over Jund al-Sham and al-Tawhid, and that he would exert operational autonomy. His suicide bombings of the hotels in Amman—in which some sixty civilians died, many of them while attending a wedding celebration—was a huge tactical mistake. My understanding is that bin Laden was furious about it."

The attacks, which represented an expansion of al-Zarqawi's sophistication and reach, also showed his growing independence from the al-Qaeda chief. They came only thirteen months after he had sworn bayat. The alliance had already begun to fray.

The signs were visible as early as the summer of 2005. In a letter purportedly sent to al-Zarqawi in July from Ayman al-Zawahiri, the Egyptian surgeon who is bin Laden's designated heir, al-Zarqawi was chided about his tactics in Iraq. And although some experts have cast doubt on the letter's authenticity (it was released by the office of the U.S. Director of National Intelligence), few would dispute its message: namely, that al-Zarqawi's hostage beheadings, his mass slaughter of Shiites, and his assaults on their mosques were all having a negative effect on Muslim opinion—both of him and, by extension, of al-Qaeda—around the world. In one admonition, al-Zawahiri allegedly advised al-Zarqawi that a captive can be killed as easily by a bullet as by a knife.

During my time in Jordan, I asked a number of officials what they considered to be the most curious aspect of the relationship between the U.S. and al-Zarqawi, other than the fact that the Bush administration had inflated him.

One of them said, "The six times you could have killed Zarqawi, and you didn't."

When Powell addressed the United Nations, he discussed the Ansar al-Islam camp near Khurmal, in northern Kurdistan, which he claimed was producing ricin and where al-Zarqawi was then based. On at least three occasions, between mid-2002 and the invasion of Iraq the following March, the Pentagon presented plans to the White House to destroy the Khurmal camp, according to a report published by *The Wall Street Journal* in October 2004. The White House either declined or simply ignored the request.

More recently, three times during the past year, the Jordanian intelligence service, which has a close liaison relationship with the CIA, provided the United States with information on al-Zarqawi's whereabouts—first in Mosul, then in Ramadi. Each time, the Americans arrived too late.

After I returned from Jordan, in mid-March, what had appeared to be a growing challenge to al-Zarqawi from local Sunni insurgent groups, which had reportedly expelled hundreds of his fighters from the troubled western province of al-Anbar alone, seemed to have been put aside. The upsurge in Sunni-Shiite killings, as the result of the February bombing of Samarra's Askariya Shrine (one of Shia Islam's holiest sites), had led, at least for the moment, to a newfound unity between al-Zarqawi and the Sunni insurgency. Then, in early April, Huthaifa Azzam announced that the "Iraqi resistance's high command" had stripped al-Zarqawi of his political role and relegated him to military operations. It was the second time that al-Zarqawi's profile had seemingly been lowered—or that he had lowered it—this year. The first had come in January, when it was announced that al-Qaeda in Iraq had joined five other Sunni insurgent groups to form a coalition called the Mujahideen Shura Council. By early May, U.S. counterterrorism analysts were still puzzling over what the two events meant and what changes they could portend.

As they debated, al-Zarqawi sprang to life again, in a video posted on the Internet on April 24. It was the first time he had appeared in a jihadist videotape, and the first time he had shown his face. Dressed in black fatigues and a black cap, he had

ammunition pouches strapped across his chest. He appeared fit, if overweight, as he posed in the desert firing an automatic weapon and as he sat with a group of masked aides, apparently plotting strategy. It seemed an extremely risky thing for him to do, and yet it also appeared to be very deliberate. It was a useful tool for recruitment, intending to show al-Zarqawi as both a flamboyant fighter and a pensive strategist. More important than anything else, however, it was meant to show the world that Abu Musab al-Zarqawi—the brash young man who had come of age in the rough-and-tumble of Zarqa—remained relevant.

Before leaving Amman, three months before al-Zarqawi's death, I had asked the high-level Jordanian intelligence official with whom I met whether al-Zarqawi, in his view, was a potential challenger to Osama bin Laden.

"Not at all," he replied. "Zarqawi had the ambition to become what he has, but whatever happens, even if he becomes the most popular figure in Iraq, he can never go against the symbolism that bin Laden represents. If Zarqawi is captured or killed tomorrow, the Iraqi insurgency will go on. There is no such thing as 'Zarqawism.' What Zarqawi is will die with him. Bin Laden, on the other hand, is an ideological thinker. He created the concept of al-Qaeda and all of its offshoots. He feels he's achieved his goal." He paused for a moment, then said, "Osama bin Laden is like Karl Marx. Both created an ideology. Marxism still flourished well after Marx's death. And whether bin Laden is killed, or simply dies of natural causes, al-Qaedaism will survive him."

Zarqawi and His Role Model

Weekly Standard

By Richard Miniter and Daveed Gartenstein-Ross

6/9

HISTORY NEVER REPEATS ITSELF precisely, but it often rhymes. Coalition forces killed Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in a safe house just outside Baghdad. More than 800 years earlier, the life of Zarqawi's role model, Nur ad-Din Zanki (1118-1174), came to an end in Damascus, another power center of the ancient Islamic world. The long overlooked connection between the two men should provide a note of instruction for the future in dealing with the Iraq insurgency.

Most tyrants and terrorists are inspired by a charismatic figure who triumphed in a heroic past. Hitler looked back to Napoleon and Frederick the Great. Lenin measured his achievements against the record of the Paris Commune of 1870.

Zarqawi's role model was twelfth century Arab fighting king Nur ad-Din Zanki. Zanki had two missions in life: to drive the Crusaders from Arab lands and to crush Shiite rulers. Few understood the importance that Zarqawi placed on him. In interviews with Iraq and Zarqawi specialists at the State Department, Defense Department and West Point's Combating Terrorism Center, we found no one who understood the importance that Zarqawi placed on Zanki.

A survey of the available literature on Zarqawi in English shows virtually no reference to Zarqawi's relationship to Zanki. In the Arab world, though, there has been a fair amount of discussion about the two men.

We recently acquired a new, never-before-translated Arabic-language book on Zarqawi, *Al Qaeda's Second Generation*, by Jordanian journalist Fouad Hussein, who has been linked to Hezbollah's al-Manar television network. An independent translation that we commissioned reveals that Zanki was in fact Zarqawi's ideological guiding star. Hussein's book reprints a long personal communication from Saif al-Adel, who heads the military wing of al Qaeda, about Zarqawi. Hussein and al-Adel put great emphasis on the fact that Zanki is Zarqawi's role model.

"One cannot understand Zarqawi and cannot attempt to predict the future of his organization and the next steps that it will take without being familiar with Nur ad-Din Zanki. Zarqawi was simply fascinated by Nur ad-Din," al-Adel told Hussein. "Regardless of where he was, Zarqawi would always look for books about Nur ad-Din. The best presents he ever got from his acquaintances were history books that would lengthily describe the jihad that Nur ad-Din Zanki waged against the crusaders and the triumphs that he led his followers to."

Hussein, who is well-acquainted with al Qaeda leaders, contends that Zarqawi made strategic decisions based on his devotion to Zanki: "This fact enables us to answer the proverbial question of why Zarqawi, of al Qaeda leaders, specifically chose to settle in Iraq after the American military occupied Afghanistan. Perhaps he wants to begin liberating Iraq from Mosul and to spread the tawheed [Islamic monotheism] in Syria, Northern Iraq and Egypt as a preliminary step before liberating Jerusalem. Perhaps it is possible for us to adopt the theory that says that those who closely study history sometimes take on their heroes' roles and follow their footsteps in order to reshape the course of history."

"By reading Nur ad-Din [Zanki]'s biography we can understand why Zarqawi chose to trust Syrians from Humaa, Allazeekia, Halab and the Jazeera area of northern Syria first. After reading Nur ad-Din's story we finally realize why he chose northern Iraq that lies on the banks of the Euphrates as a first stronghold from which to attack the American occupiers of Iraq," Hussein writes.

Saif al-Adel told Hussein, "I believe that what Abu Musab [Zarqawi] had read about Nur ad-Din [Zanki] and the fact that he started off in Mosul, Iraq greatly influenced his decision to move to Iraq after the Islamic regime in Afghanistan had collapsed."

ZANKI'S FATHER governed both Aleppo and Mosul. Zanki himself ranged over northern Iraq and Syria (as did Zarqawi). Shortly after his father was assassinated, Zanki devoted himself to vanquishing the Crusaders, a bloody goal he accomplished in Syria through a series of daring raids. After a few reverses in battle, Zanki became reflective and more religious. He was soon noted for his piety and those who praised him received large sums to build new mosques and schools.

Zanki's newfound religiosity also led him to a new enemy--the Shiites. Zanki's wars against the Shiites are legendary, culminating in the toppling of the Fatimid caliphate.

When Zanki captured Egypt, he found an extensive bureaucratic state run by Shiites. He took little time destroying it. He began systematically replacing Shiite officials with Sunni appointees. The Shiite form of the call to prayer and Isma'ili lectures at al-Azhar University and elsewhere were eliminated. Sunni jurists replaced Shiite ones throughout the country. When, two years later, Zanki's viceroy had the sermon read in Cairo in the name of the Sunni caliph, denouncing the Fatimids as infidels, two

centuries of Shiite rule officially ended.

Zanki's belief, summed up by British Arab historians David Luscombe and Jonathan Riley-Smith, that "the jihad against heresy must be pursued as vigorously as the jihad against the crusaders," has an obvious resonance with the language of heresy that was mobilized by Zarqawi against the Shiites in Iraq.

To be sure, Zarqawi, like most jihadists, also derived inspiration from Saladin, who battled Richard the Lionhearted and recaptured Jerusalem for the Muslims. But this was likely complicated for Zarqawi, given Zanki's relationship with Saladin.

Saladin served as Zanki's general in his military campaigns against the Fatimids, before robbing Zanki of his opportunity to be remembered as the man who reconquered Jerusalem--an honor that Saladin wanted for himself. When Zanki tried to organize a campaign against Jerusalem, Saladin offered a camel train of excuses, waiting until Zanki eventually died. Then Saladin struck.

Zanki's death, and the subsequent defection of many of his allies to Saladin's side, helped paper over the differences between Zanki and his more illustrious successor, giving the anti-Crusader struggle an exaggerated sense of continuity.

LIKE ZANKI, Zarqawi was a fighter first, and became religious only after personal reversals. In his Jordanian hometown of Zarqa, Zarqawi was known as a thug, a brawler, a gang enforcer. He was frequently arrested for petty crimes. He was fired from the only job he ever had after a few weeks, leaving him destitute and unmarried. The post-Soviet feuds in Afghanistan drew him there in 1993, where he immersed himself in radical Islam.

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN Zanki and Zarqawi should have been viewed as more than a historical footnote: It could have opened a new window into our fight in Iraq.

One aspect of Zarqawi's jihad that would have been illuminated was his selection of northern Iraq as a central stage for his fight against the Americans. Zanki's prominence in Zarqawi's imagination may also have provided clues about where he intended to strike next--such as trying to emulate his idol's expansion into Syria and Egypt.

And realizing this connection could have opened further opportunities for the United States. Since Zarqawi was doubtless aware of why his role model failed in retaking Jerusalem, the U.S. military and intelligence community might have embarked on a "Project Saladin" psy-ops mission to make Zarqawi suspect that his closest lieutenants' ambitions would produce similar betrayal. Zanki's legendary hatred of the Shiites and eradication of that sect's influence from the Fatimid caliphate might also have been used to drive a wedge between Zarqawi and his Iranian Shiite allies.

Killing Zarqawi does not end the war against al Qaeda in Iraq. A successor will emerge, even if he is not of Zarqawi's caliber. Hopefully, American intelligence will learn about the historical role models of his successor, and use it to their advantage.

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The Stakes

National Review

By Rich Lowry

6/9

The Texas outlaw John Wesley Hardin once famously said that he never killed anyone who didn't need killing. Hardin's definition of who needed killing was considerably too liberal. But if there ever were anyone who unquestionably exhibited such a need, it was the late Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, Iraq's maestro of vileness and death.

Killing Zarqawi is the equivalent of averting a Haditha every other day in Iraq, indefinitely. Massacres weren't exceptionally rare, once-every-few-decades lapses in the code of conduct of Zarqawi's fighters--as they are for ours--they were a way of life. Zarqawi took the death cult that surrounds suicide bombing and pushed it to its hellish logical conclusion.

He made 1983's horrific suicide bombing against the Marine barracks in Lebanon seem quaint. That attack was directed at U.S. personnel and had a goal that was at least understandable: chasing the U.S. from Lebanon. Zarqawi, in contrast, targeted women, children, and people attending wedding celebrations. For Zarqawi, most everyone in Iraq--but especially anyone from the Shiite majority--was a potential pool of blood and a few scattered shoes, with loved ones wailing in the background.

His tactical goal was more death. He wanted to provoke the Shiite into acts as cruel as his own, and unfortunately had achieved some success. The vengeful Shiite militia members plying the streets of Baghdad with their power tools to torture Sunni men before dumping their bodies in the street are Zarqawi's progeny. He gleefully pointed to their murderous work as justification for even more killing by Sunnis, toward a full-scale civil war making Iraq a nation as Hieronymus Bosch painting, an Arab Rwanda choking on its own blood.

The word for this vision is "evil." It has become fashionable, in light of the setbacks we've suffered in Iraq, to regret President Bush's black-and-white, good-and-evil view of the world. In his new book, *The Good Fight*, writer Peter Beinart argues that one of the great strengths of liberal foreign policy is that it is unburdened by such simplistic reckonings. But sometimes the ledger is indeed quite simple--with Zarqawi's demise, the sum total of evil in the world is now a little less. Everyone professes to know this. But some know it more than others. Otherwise a major Democrat like John Kerry wouldn't be advocating a full U.S. pullout from Iraq. Until Iraqi forces can carry the load, a pullout means abandoning the field to the likes of Zarqawi. If last week Kerry had been given a magic wand to wave and make all U.S. troops disappear from Iraq instantly, Zarqawi would almost certainly be alive right now. There would have been no one to send F-16s to drop two 500-pound bombs on his head.

Within hours of the news breaking of Zarqawi's death, Rep. John Murtha was on CNN saying we should leave Iraq and let the Iraqis work out their civil war just the way we worked out ours. Of course, 600,000 died in our Civil War. And the Iraqis "working it out" would be accomplished with truck bombs and ethnic cleansing.

Humanitarian considerations aside, the stakes in Iraq are incalculably large. If many politicians in the U.S. have never realized this, Zarqawi always did. He knew the advent of decent government in the Arab world would be a blow to the ideology of terror, hence his ultimate strategic goal of forestalling it with mayhem and slaughter. We don't know if we will prevail in Iraq, and there is argument over the means of doing it--should our tactics be harsher or softer?--but there's no doubt about how to lose: pull out prematurely. That's why Kerry, Murtha, et al., are effectively advocates of defeat.

From beyond the grave, Zarqawi can only wish that the Democrats for a pullout had been able to affect their preferred policy already. Then this loathsome man who so needed killing would instead still be working his evil will.

-- Rich Lowry is author of *Legacy: Paying the Price for the Clinton Years*. (c) 2006 King Features Syndicate

An Opening

National Review

Editorial

6/9

Banner days in Iraq don't happen very often, but yesterday was one. The news that a U.S. air strike had killed Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, combined with the selection of consensus choices to head the defense and interior ministries, provides a dose of hope on both the security and the political front. Supporters of the war are constantly looking for signs of a strategic turning point in Iraq, and some discern one in these events. Perhaps. But the developments definitely provide an opening for President Bush to redouble our efforts before Iraq slides further into chaos, and before declining American popular support forecloses spending more blood or treasure there.

Zarqawi's death is particularly welcome because it comes at such a distressing time in Iraq. According to the Pentagon's report to Congress on Iraqi stability and security, attacks between February and May of this year were higher than in any previous period over the last two years. Total casualties, including both Iraqis and Americans, are up. In March 2006, car bombs were at their highest level since October 2005. Sectarian violence is up since the attack on Golden Mosque in February. All of this makes for a deteriorating security picture, even as oil production and electricity generation are flat.

This is why, prior to the latest news, some hawks inside and outside the administration were beginning privately to use the "D" word, defeat. That would be a strategic catastrophe for the United States and a political calamity for the Bush administration. Oddly, the U.S. government has not been giving the war a 100-percent effort, even though Bush shows every indication of understanding the stakes in Iraq. To take one example that military writer Thomas X. Hammes pointed out the other day, the administration has long talked of creating 16 provincial reconstruction teams in Iraq--specialists in all the important areas of civil affairs who would assist Iraqis at the regional level. Such teams have been a success in Afghanistan, but only four have been created in Iraq.

When it comes to U.S. military strategy, it is not always clear whether the first priority is "clear, sweep, and hold"--i.e., sweeping insurgents out of a given area, then leaving enough American or Iraqi forces that they don't come back--or simply getting American troops off the streets and back into their bases. Sometimes the Bush administration gives the impression that, in light of the unpopularity of the war at the moment, it wants to tiptoe in Iraq, doing a bare minimum that might secure victory if everything breaks the right way. This may seem to minimize political risk, but it actually increases it. If things don't break the right way--and they often don't--it means courting defeat. And there is no unobtrusive, politically painless way to lose a war. People will notice.

The killing of Zarqawi and the completion of Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's government is a fortunate confluence that allows a new departure in Iraq. Zarqawi's killing will make the American public think progress is possible in a way that a recitation of optimistic statistics never will. The White House believes--correctly, in our view--that the portion of the American public that is persuadable on Iraq will listen to a message based on the argument that loss in Iraq will bring dire consequences, and that the U.S. is constantly adjusting based on conditions rather than mindlessly "staying the course." A redoubling of effort now could be sold in these terms, and it would be natural to couple it with the completion of Maliki's government.

In a new departure, it should become obvious that the rest of the U.S. government cares as much about success in Iraq as whichever 130,000 American troops happen to be there at any time. Gen. Barry McCaffrey's latest memo on Iraq contains a devastating critique of this lack of focus. "The bottom line," he writes, "is that only the CIA and the U.S. Armed Forces are at war." Among other things, more resources and personnel should be poured into an attempt to establish in Iraq something like the intelligence superiority that Israelis enjoy in the West Bank, and into accelerating the training and equipping of Iraqi security forces.

Most important, we should work with Maliki on a plan to secure Baghdad, the linchpin of Iraq, and be willing to face the fact that he probably doesn't have the forces to do it on his own. The training of the Iraqi army has been a success story, but the police--so important in any counter-insurgency--are a disaster. They routinely torture and murder, and, at the moment, are part of the problem. If Maliki, in these conditions, says he needs, say, another 20,000 U.S. troops to finally secure Baghdad, Bush shouldn't hesitate.

This would bring howls and comparisons to the escalation in Vietnam. But we suspect the public would be willing to swallow it, if such an increase in troops levels is persuasively linked to a plan for victory. The comparisons to Vietnam are more aptly made about the status quo, which has featured steadily ebbing domestic support and an arguably decaying situation on the ground. In sheer political terms, Bush is probably better off taking action--even what seems a risky action in an election year--than "staying the course" with the same old resolute, reassuring talk.

It is true, as we have often said, that the Iraqi political process is crucial to victory. But it is a necessary, not sufficient, condition for success. The mainstream Sunni embrace of legitimate Iraqi politics should eventually drain the insurgency of some of its power, but the timeline could be long. With his attempted crackdown in militia-infested Basra and his release of low-level Sunni detainees, Maliki appears to have the right idea--getting a handle on the security situation while pursuing reconciliation

with the Sunnis. But if he has the will to exert his control, he might not have the means, and that is where we could still have a decisive influence.

To paraphrase Emerson, events have too often been in the saddle in Iraq lately. We should work to change that while we still can. The killing of Zarqawi was one important victory; now we should do what's necessary to create more of them.

WAR ON TERRORISM

The Education of Ali Al-Timimi

Atlantic

By Milton Viorst

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Describing him as a "rock star" of Islamic fundamentalism in the United States, the government sent an American Muslim scientist to prison for life. But has justice been served?

Back in the late seventies Ali al-Timimi used to hang around our house with my son Nick. They were twelve or thirteen, classmates at a very liberal, heavily Jewish, private day school that was founded by New Dealers when the public schools in Washington were still segregated. Small and slight for their age, both were outsiders. They went to rock concerts and drank beer together, and to this day Nick acknowledges the comfort the friendship brought him as they faced the burdens of intruding adolescence.

Soon after Nick entered high school, Ali went off with his parents to Saudi Arabia, and the two never met again. A year ago Nick called me to say he had learned from the newspapers that Ali had been sentenced to life in prison for what the FBI described as recruiting followers after 9/11 to prepare for an anti-American jihad. Characterized by the supervising U.S. attorney as a "kingpin of hate," Ali was charged specifically with conspiring to induce eleven young Muslims in northern Virginia, most of them American, to fight with the Taliban against U.S. troops in Afghanistan.

Over the next few months I tried to find out more about Ali, now forty-two years old. Piecing together the mosaic of his life was not easy. Not only was he himself in prison, beyond my reach, but the Muslim men who knew him, intimidated by the anti-Muslim atmosphere that has pervaded the country since 9/11, were all unwilling to talk. President Bush, during the recent fuss over allowing a Dubai company to run terminals at the nation's major ports, argued that the United States must not convey to the world an impression that it is biased against Muslims. But among Muslims I encountered, not a single one would say that it is not.

The news of Ali's case brought to mind the incident that my wife and I most vividly associated with him. It was at Nick's bar mitzvah, in 1977. Ali was among the friends Nick had invited. It had not occurred to us that he was the only Muslim among them. But we were not prepared for the anti-Arab diatribe that the rabbi, a fervid Zionist, delivered as his sermon. I still recall squirming at the rabbi's words, while hoping the teenagers sitting together in the front row would be too bored to pay attention.

Nearly thirty years later, in my quest to understand Ali, I learned how futile that hope had been.

In *American Muslims: A Community Under Siege*, by Ahmed Yousef, a book published before Ali's imprisonment, Ali described what the incident had meant to him: "We entered the synagogue and all the boys, Jewish and non-Jewish, placed yarmulkes on their heads in accordance with Jewish rituals. After the rituals, the rabbi began to address the audience. He began to attack the Arabs by saying they sought to kill young Jewish boys. I was offended that I would be associated with seeking to murder my Jewish classmate and one of my closest friends."

Ali was also quoted in the book as saying that after the service I came to him and apologized for the rabbi's statements; I do not remember that part of it. He told Yousef that the whole episode had made, in Yousef's words, a "lasting impact" on him, forcing him to recognize that, whoever he was, "in the larger world, issues of his ethnicity and religion would be something by which people were going to make judgments about him."

Paradoxically, the household in which Ali was raised was not particularly ethnic or religious. His parents moved to the United States from Baghdad for professional reasons, in 1962, and made up their minds never to go back. Mehdi, his father, was a lawyer who worked in Iraq's embassy and, in his free time, obtained an M.A. in law at George Washington University. Sahera, his mother, was a university student when they arrived, and she took pride in telling me that she had acquired three master's degrees and a Ph.D. in psychology. She then went on to a distinguished career in mental-health education. "We were very ambitious," she told me. "We vowed to make something of ourselves. That's the main thing we taught the children."

Ali was born in 1963, and his brother, Zaid, three years later. Photos in the family album show them growing up, like other American children, with Halloween costumes and Christmas trees surrounded by toys. Ali wears a baseball cap in one snapshot, a McDonald's T-shirt in another. At one of Ali's birthday parties, Nick is in a picture with other classmates cheering as Ali blows out the candles on a cake. Ali's mother told me that, though she and her husband were committed Muslims—she wore a veil until she was in high school, he recited daily prayers, neither of them drank alcohol—they spoke English, not Arabic, at home and did not push religious observance on the children. In photos in his late teens, Ali, already bearded, posed wearing an Islamic headdress. But in a biographical sketch written many years later, he recalled that even at age thirteen he did not know that Muslims everywhere face Mecca to pray.

Ali's transformation began in 1978, when the al-Timimis took their sons to Saudi Arabia for an extended stay, to open them to their Islamic heritage. Ali's father obtained a legal post in the Saudi Ministry of Transport; his mother was named to set up a department of psychological counseling at the University of Riyadh. For their sons, they chose a school that promised to combine rigorous instruction in Western academic disciplines with an introduction to Sunni Islam, the sect to which the family belonged. Most of the students, Ali has written, were offspring of the families of Western Muslims who worked in the kingdom.

In Ali's first year, students memorized segments of the Koran, studied some Islamic law, and learned the correct performance of Islamic rituals. In the second, Ali came under the influence of a young Canadian convert, a graduate of the Islamic

university at Medina, who offered him an understanding of the faith within the framework of Western culture. The version of Islam that Ali absorbed was called Salafiya, derived from salaf, the term attached to the three generations that followed the Prophet Muhammad in the seventh century. These generations are said to be Islam's model of purity. Salafis, in emulating practices that go back to the roots of the faith, are much like the fundamentalists of other religions. They are not a sect, like Sunnis and Shiites, but a school of religious devotion. Ali brought this devotion with him when he returned to Washington in 1981 to begin college.

Still, it is not clear why Ali became a Salafi. The scar left on his memory by the rabbi's anti-Arab rhetoric at Nick's bar mitzvah represents at most an insight into his thinking. Now, locked away, he is not able to provide a better explanation. In Yousef's profile, written in 2004, he says, "I left the United States in 1978 when Islam was at best a passing curiosity; I came back for college in 1981 when Islam after the Iranian revolution was now at the center of the news." Elsewhere he cited a series of traumatic episodes within the Islamic world that upset him: the violent seizure of the holy mosque in Mecca, in 1979, by Islamic fanatics; Russia's invasion of Afghanistan in the same year; the intra-Muslim carnage of the Iran-Iraq War, which began in 1980. In Washington, Ali stepped up his study of Arabic and turned to the examination of Islam's original sources to strengthen his beliefs. At the same time, he resolved to pass his Islamic learning along to others.

Ali enrolled in a pre-med program at a local university, but he probably devoted more time to his readings in Islam than to his coursework. Though a good student, he did not become a doctor after earning his degree; his mother blames an asthmatic condition that kept him out of the labs. But whatever the reason, he spent much of his time mixing with the new and often rival communities of Muslims—Arabs, Iranians, African-Americans—that were growing up around mosques in the Washington area. The Yousef book quotes him as saying, "Of course, I got caught up in the politics ... I flirted with each group, only quickly to become disinterested in their rhetoric and what I perceived as their being out of touch with the questions being raised in America—about Islam and the Muslims." He was instrumental in forming a study group exploring Salafiya. "In the end," he said, "I was hungry for answers to the larger philosophical questions." This hunger propelled him back to Saudi Arabia, in 1987, to increase his understanding of Islam.

For a year Ali explored the doctrines of Salafiya at the elite Islamic university in Medina, where the Prophet Muhammad founded his religious community fourteen centuries ago. Being in Islam's second-holiest city, the university attracts thousands of students from around the world. The Saudi government covered Ali's tuition, along with his room and board, as it did for all the students there. The curriculum at Medina was aligned with Wahhabism, the politicized form of Salafiya, named for Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, the eighteenth-century zealot who fused his own puritanical theology with the political ambitions of the Saud tribe to found the monarchy that lasts to this day. Ali's focus, however, was more on the theology than on the politics.

By now Ali's Arabic was strong enough to carry him in the classroom. Moreover, his obvious ardor for the religion, combined with his being one of the few Americans in Medina, made him special and gave him access to some of Saudi Arabia's leading Islamic thinkers. Most notable among them was Abdul-Aziz bin Baz, the blind sheikh who later, as grand mufti, the kingdom's highest legal authority, would become the official interpreter and defender of Saudi Salafiya. Ali developed a strong attachment

to bin Baz, in which his parents took pride. But they envisioned him in a secular career and urged him to return home. Had they not, it seems likely he would have stayed on far longer to pursue his religious calling.

Back in the United States, Ali enrolled for a second bachelor's, this one in computer science at the University of Maryland, while doing parallel studies in software programming at George Washington University, where his father and mother had obtained degrees. Within a few years his level of skills permitted him to hold a sequence of jobs with high-tech computer firms based in the Washington area. One of them was SRA International, a highly regarded company where Ali worked as a "bioinformatics software architect," providing information technology to the government. Some of the jobs required that Ali obtain a high-level security clearance; one assignment was in response to a call from the White House, which provided him with a letter of commendation after his work was done. He later enrolled as a doctoral candidate at George Mason University, in northern Virginia, near where he then lived. The specialty he chose was computational biology, a new field that contained the promise of breaking fresh ground in medicine through the advanced use of computers.

Ali also lived a rich personal life. His renown as an Islamic scholar was growing, earning him invitations to lecture to Muslim groups in the United States and abroad. In 1991 he married Ziyana al-Rawahi, a slim, attractive Omani who had come to Washington five years earlier for university studies. She had been introduced to him by her brother, also a student, whom Ali had met at a local mosque. Twenty at the time, Ziyana was a devout Muslim who recited prayers daily and wore a traditional head scarf. But she was also a modern woman who dressed fashionably and shared Ali's dual commitment to faith and the intellect.

Ali and Ziyana eventually moved to a comfortable duplex in Fairfax, Virginia. His library, overflowing with books both in Arabic and in English, occupied the ground floor. Over coffee Ziyana told me, "Ali and I didn't have much time together. He was always so busy. He loved being a good Muslim and felt a duty to teach people about Islam. But he was also a scientist, who didn't buy the idea that all wisdom came from the Koran. Some people say Ali had two identities: one in faith, the other in science. I don't believe that. His life was very open. He didn't hide anything. I believe he was a man whose parts, religious and scientific, fit together."

Ziyana volunteered that Ali was committed to *ijtihad*, the reinterpretation of Islamic doctrine, particularly *sharia*, or Islamic law. The word has the same root as *jihad*, which means "to struggle" or "to strive"—and, by extension, "holy war." Muslims agree on a duty to perform *jihad*, in the sense of striving to deepen their faith; the duty that some see to wage holy war is more controversial. *Ijtihad*, different from both, is an intellectual struggle that the principal Islamic sages, in adopting the controlling body of doctrine a thousand years ago, declared permanently closed. Since then, Muslims have debated—with Shiites more open to change than Sunnis—whether religious reinterpretation was permissible at all. Ali, within the framework of Sunni orthodoxy, was on the side of those who chose to go beyond acceptance and to grapple with religious ideas.

"He and I would talk sometimes of living in a Muslim country," Ziyana went on, "but we never did anything about it. Though Ali was often upset with American policies in the Middle East, he never doubted that he was American. He was used to American

ways. He said the openness of America shaped his work as a scientist. Ali liked being American.”

Curtis Jamison, Ali’s dissertation director at George Mason, told me that Ali’s innovations in computational biology were at the threshold of a significant breakthrough in cancer research. The school even hired Ali—though it let him go after he came under suspicion by the FBI—to design a computer program that coordinated the research of several universities. While he was at George Mason, Ali published or co-published a half-dozen scientific papers.

“I knew Ali was religious, even spiritual,” Jamison said. He recalled that he and Ali attended several academic conferences together, where they talked through the night about science and the philosophy of science. Jamison said Ali loved to discuss ideas, and at no point revealed a strong Islamic influence in his views, much less a religious extremism. “He excused himself several times a day to pray,” Jamison said. “But he did not proselytize among his colleagues, or allow religion into his work. He was a total professional.”

In the introduction to “Chaos and Complexity in Cancer,” his doctoral dissertation, Ali made an observation about the transformation of science in the Christian West that surprised me in its sharp departure from conventional religious dogma. “Following the Christianization of the Hellenic world,” he wrote,

medieval Europe understood God to be the ultimate source of life with all its diversity. This combination of an unwavering belief in a Divine ultimate cause, with the traditional emphasis on a purely descriptive approach to biology, led to a type of rigidity of thought ... It was only ... the drifting away and then final divorce of Western intellectual thought from the Church that led to a sharp break from philosophical and theological notions of life. [*Italics mine.*] Emancipated from philosophy and theology, and coupled with the foundational discoveries of embryology ... cell theory ... and genetics ... biology set on a new direction with the appearance of Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species*. The main task of post-Darwinian biology now shifted from cataloguing the diversity of life to understanding the mechanics ... that led to that diversity.

Ali, in conversation, argued vigorously that Muslim scientists, throughout history, were at the same time religious scholars. Ziyana told me he believed improving the well-being of mankind through science was in accord with Salafiya. In one of his lectures Ali raised eyebrows in the audience by asserting that contemporary Salafi thinkers, through doctrinal rigidity, risked making themselves into a “country club” of believers. Until Ali is available to explain them himself, it seems fair to say his doctoral comments proceeded from a conviction that Islamic science would remain inferior to the West’s until it freed itself of the intellectual shackles imposed on it by religious orthodoxy.

Whatever his achievements in science, Ali was known to most Muslims as a preacher of the doctrines of Salafi Islam. His mission was dawa—that is, propagation of the faith. His reputation was as a teacher of theology, moreover, not as a political advocate. Dozens of his talks are available on the Internet in text and in audio format. They contain little about Arab concerns with the Arab-Israeli wars, the rivalries between the Arab states, the problems faced by Muslims living in the West, or even the war in Iraq. Rather, they reveal a man who reflects deeply on the Islamic

vision of Judgment Day, prophecy, the nature of the divine, and fiqh —Islamic jurisprudence)—subjects with which he grappled in Medina and in his private reading.

Much as Ali regarded himself as religious, he also considered himself a rational man. He spoke of being influenced by Sheikh Jafar Idris, a Salafi scholar who had come to northern Virginia from Sudan and taught him to use “rational methods” to defend Islam. His rationality, however, did not interfere with his rejection of reform in traditional Islamic ideals and behavior. In these matters, Ali’s outlook was profoundly fundamentalist.

Ali never departed from his belief that Islam offered mankind more than Western values did, even in science. “By Allah’s grace, we possess something the West does not,” he declared in a lecture titled “Muslims and the Study of the Future,” given in London in 1996. “We have the true source of knowledge, the Koran and the Sunna, something which is inerrant. And therefore, because of that true source of knowledge, our ability to think and our ability to interpret is more correct than theirs.” Similarly, he envisaged Islam as the key to social progress. In a 1993 talk at Purdue University titled “Islam: The Cure for Societal Ills,” he declared that among the non-Muslim countries, “the United States is probably the best society known to humanity in terms of its justice... But [its] problems ... are insurmountable in my opinion because of the lack of the application of the sharia.”

In 1995, upset that President Clinton had named secular Muslim women to represent the United States at the World Conference on Women, in Beijing, Ali persuaded the Islamic Assembly of North America, a Salafi society, to send him as head of a dissenting delegation. The Beijing meeting was designed to promote women’s rights worldwide; Ali argued that historically the West was more oppressive than Islam to women, and that sharia offered them more than did American-style feminism or the United Nations’ declarations. Ali’s delegation held press conferences, passed out tracts, and gave interviews to the international press. Both Ali and Ziyana delivered lectures; hers were circumspect, his were outspoken, particularly in denouncing lesbianism. Press reports indicate that, whatever their impact, Ali and his group created a buzz in Beijing.

Like orthodox thinkers of other faiths, Ali conveyed great certainty in his religious judgments. Not only did he reject the doctrines of Islamic modernism but, as a Sunni, he also showed no sympathy for Sufism and Shiism, alternate forms of Islam. Though personally at ease with Jews and Christians, he expressed great disdain for the belief systems of Judaism and Christianity. Like most Arabs, he perceived Islam and the West as historic adversaries. Still, he was not inflammatory. On the contrary, his words conveyed a sense that these rivalries, being spiritual in nature, would not be resolved in our time, and surely not by bloodshed.

In the late 1990s, with Muslims settling in northern Virginia in growing numbers, Ali began drawing a steady audience. Sheikh Jafar, his mentor, had opened his home to Friday-night prayer services, then founded a storefront mosque that he named Dar al-Arqam, after one of the first Islamic schools founded by the Prophet Muhammad. Ali, sometimes dressed in Islamic robes, lectured there in English, usually presenting lessons on Salafiya. Typically, a hundred or so worshippers heard him. Many were converts, black and white; some were migrants from Islamic lands; most were professionals or technicians. Ali came to know a few of them but was generally too

busy with his scientific work and diverse studies to cultivate real friendships with any.

It is clear Ali did not know that a dozen or so of the Dar al-Arqam worshippers met on weekends to play paintball, a widely popular rough-and-tumble game resembling small-unit military exercises. Paintball Web sites make much of the ferocity of the game, often played in organized leagues; they advertise the sale of protective masks, goggles, and helmets, and a range of paintball guns. Players maneuver in teams through fields and woods, and shoot paint-filled pellets at one another until a winner is declared.

But paintball was more than a game for the Dar al-Arqam players. It was an opportunity to entertain the brave visions of jihad, to be waged on behalf of beleaguered Muslims in Bosnia and Chechnya. Some of the players also owned firearms and on weeknights met to watch videos of combat between Muslims and infidels. A few went further, devising plans for military training in Pakistan, at camps founded with U.S. help in the 1980s by an organization called Lashkar-e-Taiba, meaning "army of the pure." LET, whose founding aim was to promote anti-Soviet resistance in Afghanistan, later redirected its effort to Pakistan's conflict with India over Kashmir. Ali, who knew nothing of the firearms or the videos, learned of the paintball fantasies only after 9/11, and once expressed some puzzlement to the players over why they did not get more easily into shape by playing soccer.

After the 9/11 attacks on New York and Washington, however, paintball among Muslims in northern Virginia appeared to U.S. authorities to be more than just indulging fantasies. President Bush promised that Muslims would be protected, and violent hate crimes actually turned out to be few. But within days federal authorities initiated anti-terrorist programs that singled out Muslims for detention and deportation. Thousands of Muslims were interrogated by law-enforcement officials, and terrorism charges were brought against some 150 of them. Special security procedures targeted Muslims in airports, and many Islamic charities and businesses were shut down on the grounds that they abetted terrorists. Muslim life was invaded by a sense of dread. Despite the president's promises, evidence was abundant that Muslims were being treated differently from other Americans.

At the Dar al-Arqam mosque on the night of the attacks, Ali publicly criticized the killing of innocent people by the al-Qaeda hijackers but urged Muslims to make contingency plans to protect themselves and their families. Five days later, seven of the paintball players gathered for dinner in the apartment of Yong Ki Kwon, a twenty-five-year-old Korean-born convert, to discuss how they should proceed. Kwon, who lived near Ali, had sometimes driven him to his lectures. While Kwon was picking up take-out kebabs for the dinner, he and Ali spoke by phone, and Kwon learned that Ali was free that evening. Kwon invited Ali to join his other guests so that he could provide them with Islamic guidance. Kwon's dinner party was to lead to indictments of all of the attendees, and prison for most.

Not surprisingly, the accounts of the dinner party that participants presented to law-enforcement authorities vary in details, but the overall picture that emerges is remarkably consistent. The guests all recalled an atmosphere of great tension. Some expressed apprehension that they or their families would be set upon by mobs and their homes burned. When Ali arrived, he ordered that the phones be disconnected and the blinds drawn. He also elicited everyone's promise that the discussion be kept secret. When two paintball players, one of them unknown to him, arrived late, he

stopped talking until after they had left. Later, federal prosecutors cited these events as proof that the dinner was the start of a criminal conspiracy.

Versions of what Ali said at the dinner were also reasonably consistent, though differences in detail were crucial. One explanation for the differences lies in the fact that after their indictments, many of the dinner guests negotiated plea-bargaining agreements that required them to testify against Ali. At his trial Ali himself remained silent, though earlier he had spoken voluntarily to the FBI and his statements were presented to the jury. Still, when the prosecution did not like what he was quoted as saying, it simply claimed that Muslims who wage jihad are taught to lie. Under the circumstances, it is remarkable that the dinner guests' versions of the talk Ali delivered that night differed as little as they did.

Ali, it is agreed, began with an exposition of Salafiya, holding that the 9/11 attacks augured the imminence of the end of days. Muslims, he said, had a duty to repent their sins. He then advised his listeners that they and their families might best leave America, following the precedent of the Prophet Muhammad, who, in the hijra of 622 A.D., fled with his disciples from Mecca, where they had been persecuted, to the safety of Medina. As his third point, Ali reviewed—rashly, as it turned out—the Islamic doctrine of jihad as holy war, and pointed out that his listeners could serve the faith as mujahideen in Kashmir, Chechnya, or Afghanistan.

The government's charges against Ali turned on the third point, the Afghanistan alternative. On the night of Kwon's party, most Americans assumed that President Bush would soon open a front against Osama bin Laden and the Taliban regime, bin Laden's host. But Bush had not yet announced his plans. When prosecutors argued that Ali had urged the killing of American soldiers in Afghanistan, the defense replied that U.S. troops were neither present nor assigned there at the time he spoke. Had killing been his motive, the defense lawyers said, Ali had only to propose a fifteen-minute drive to the Pentagon, where countless uniformed Americans worked every day. On a key related issue, witnesses split over whether Ali had declared that jihad in Afghanistan was a duty or simply an Islamic option. Though no witness testified that Ali advocated violence, his raising the Afghanistan prospect opened the door to prosecution for conspiring against the United States.

Ali held the stage after dinner that evening for only an hour or so, after which Kwon drove him home. When Kwon returned, the agenda of the dinner guests shifted to the logistics of jihad. By coincidence, one of the guests, a Pakistani national named Muhammad Aatique, had already made arrangements to visit his family in Karachi. Three of the others, Kwon among them, agreed to meet him at one of the LET training camps in Pakistan. Several of the guests then walked to a nearby 7-Eleven store, where they bought a phone card and placed an untraceable call to the LET office in Lahore, presumably to give notice of these plans. Over the next few days Kwon and two other dinner guests went to the Pakistani embassy to obtain visas for the trip.

On September 19, Ali had lunch at a local kebab shop with Kwon and his traveling companion, Khwaja Mahmood Hasan, who also had relatives in Pakistan. Both subsequently testified that Ali expressed neither approval nor disapproval of their intentions but urged them to be cautious. Over the following two days, the four paintball players flew to Pakistan. Kwon and Hasan spent several weeks sightseeing, shopping, relaxing on the beach, and visiting with Hasan's family. They all met up finally at the designated LET camp, where they underwent some training in the use

of AK-47s, machine guns, and rocket-propelled grenades. Within a few more weeks, however, all apparently had lost their ardor for jihad and returned home. None reached Afghanistan; none fired a shot at an American.

A year and a half later the government charged the eleven paintball players with conspiracy "in furtherance of violent jihad." It is not clear why so much time had elapsed before the prosecution. The government referred to the defendants as the Virginia Jihad Network and said they had been under investigation since 2000, when the paintball games began. It alleged that among the specific crimes the defendants had committed was the journey to Pakistan; the defense countered that the visit was not criminal, since the LET camps were only placed on the U.S. government's terrorist list well after the trip took place.

"Anyone who doubts the importance of breaking up this network," said Paul McNulty, the supervising U.S. attorney on the case, and now the deputy attorney general, "underestimates the challenge America faces in its ongoing war against ... terrorism." Six of the eleven pleaded guilty and negotiated prison terms. Kwon and Hasan, who later testified against Ali, were among them; both received eleven years but were released after less than three. At the trial of the remaining defendants, the prosecution declared that they had followed "not the tenets of Islam but a warped, paranoid view of the world." Three were convicted and drew extended sentences. Two were acquitted. Attorney General John Ashcroft exulted at the convictions, calling them "a stark reminder that terrorist organizations are active in the United States."

By the time Ali himself went to trial, in 2005, his case had dragged on for nearly four years. The FBI had contacted him a week after 9/11, and he met with its agents several times. Later, his house was searched, and many of his books and mementos were taken away. His passport was seized. It was no secret that his phone was routinely tapped.

Among the targets of the taps were conversations Ali had in 2002 with Sheikh Safar al-Hawali, a well-known Saudi scholar, concerning a letter to Congress in opposition to the looming invasion of Iraq. Ali composed the letter; al-Hawali signed it. A decade before, shortly after the first Gulf War, al-Hawali had been jailed by the Saudi authorities for his opposition to the basing of American troops in the kingdom for deployment against Iraq. Though many Saudis shared his position, the FBI took his jailing to mean al-Hawali was an extremist linked to bin Laden. Later, the prosecution claimed Ali's guilt by association with al-Hawali.

But it was a weak case, as were other FBI efforts to tie Ali to terrorism. The government had made no effort to indict Ali in the paintball prosecutions, though it referred to him as an unindicted conspirator. As such, his presence loomed large: the trial prosecutors called him the "spiritual leader" of the paintball plot. But the Justice Department also offered a plea bargain to Ali, proposing to abandon prosecution of him as head of the putative conspiracy if he accepted a fourteen-year prison term. Insisting he had committed no crime, Ali refused. Only then did the government bring the full indictment, seeking to obtain through a guilty verdict a mandatory life sentence.

The prosecutor of Ali's case was Gordon D. Kromberg, a career lawyer in the U.S. attorney's office in Alexandria. Kromberg had received a commendation the year before from Attorney General Ashcroft for the paintball prosecution. The citation said

he had produced “the largest number of terrorist convictions of any single case to date.”

Earlier, Kromberg had toured Israel on a United Jewish Communities mission and kept a diary, which was posted on the Internet. In it he cited “the enthusiasm of the Palestinians to use mass murder as a tool against the Israelis for no apparent end other than to destroy Israel.” These words were not directed at Ali, whose origins were Iraqi, not Palestinian, but they conveyed, for me, something of Kromberg’s attitude, in that they echoed the anti-Arab screed that Ali had heard the rabbi deliver at my son Nick’s bar mitzvah thirty years earlier.

The ten-count indictment focused on Kwon’s dinner party. It contended that Ali had provided advice and encouragement that induced the conspirators to levy war against the United States, supply services to the Taliban, acquire firearms to promote violence, and train for military expeditions against foreign states. It alleged further that Ali not only promoted the journey of the paintball players to the Pakistani camps but, in doing so, joined in the preparation of war against a friendly state, India. Going beyond 9/11, it stretched the period of the conspiracy to February 2003, when Ali publicly spoke of the crash of the U.S. space shuttle Columbia as a Salafi allegory. He described it as an omen of the imminent end of the West’s domination of the Muslim world—because the shuttle’s name evoked the year 1492, when the Muslims were expelled from Spain; because the shuttle carried an Israeli in its crew; and because parts of it fell near a city in Texas named Palestine. Objectionable as the talk may have been, however, the prosecution never linked it to the paintball conspiracy. Apparently none of the players even heard Ali deliver it.

Kromberg, in the course of the trial proceedings, stated repeatedly that Ali had urged the paintball players to fight and kill American troops in Afghanistan. Out of religious belief, Kromberg concluded, Ali was “soliciting treason.” Kromberg called Ali a “rock star,” in possession of Islamic wizardry that awed his followers, who knew little or nothing about the faith. “These young men,” Kromberg said in his opening statement, “wanted to live their lives as good Muslims, and what they understood to be living their lives as good Muslims is based on what Ali Timimi told them ... This case is about what Ali Timimi told the young men who respected him, who revered him ... who loved him, and most of all, who listened to him.” He used even stronger language in his closing argument, saying, “These guys couldn’t figure out how to tie their shoelaces without asking Ali Timimi.”

Ali, dressed in a dark suit and a pressed white shirt, followed the trial proceedings carefully. His mother and his wife, wearing a hijab, sat nearby. He was represented by Edward B. MacMahon Jr., a single practitioner who had a small office in northern Virginia, had contributed to George W. Bush’s two presidential campaigns, and belonged to the same golf club as the president’s father. Whatever his political disposition, MacMahon took the job of defending Ali seriously and won the admiration of the legal community for the ardor and intelligence he brought to the case.

MacMahon pointed out that Ali barely knew the paintball players and in the crucial weeks after 9/11 had spent no more than a few hours with them—hardly enough for him to function as ringleader of a seditious plot. He argued during the proceedings that the prosecution’s claims were heavily laden with religious prejudice, particularly citing Kromberg’s effort to discredit Ali’s statements to the FBI on the grounds that Islam authorizes believers to lie. MacMahon declared that, even if Ali presented the pursuit of jihad as an Islamic duty, he was speaking as a teacher, and at no time did

his statements meet the legal standard of inciting his listeners to make war on the United States. Ali, MacMahon said, was at the bar not for his acts but for his ideas, which he had a right to hold, as unpalatable as Americans might find them.

After seven days of deliberation, however, the jury accepted the prosecution's arguments and on April 26, 2005, convicted Ali on all ten counts.

On the eve of his arrest Ali spoke at a northern Virginia mosque, though it was not the familiar Dar al-Arqam, which now was closed. "I can worship Allah just as well in a prison cell as I can outside," he declared. But Ali was not submissive at his sentencing, and he refused the conventional course of appealing to the judge for mercy.

"My claim to innocence," he said,

is not because of any inherent misunderstanding on my part as to the nature of the crimes for which I was convicted. Nor is it because my Muslim belief recognizes sharia law rather than secular law, as somebody might argue. It is merely because I am innocent ... To accept these charges, we must believe that a solitary man who would spend his days working full-time at one of Fortune magazine's 100 best companies and then spend his evenings and weekends engaged in cancer research for a doctorate in computational biology, an individual who has never owned or used a gun, never traveled to a military camp, never set foot in a country in which a war was taking place, never raised money for any violent organization, would be—could be—the author of so much harm ... Someone who did not observe the proceeding might justifiably ask, "How then was he convicted?" The answer, of course, was "Simply out of fear" ... In the end, Your Honor, I too, like Socrates, am accused and found guilty of nothing more than corrupting the youth and practicing a different religion than that of the majority. Socrates was mercifully given a cup of hemlock. I was handed a life sentence.

Ali has been incarcerated at five different locations, the most recent being the U.S. Penitentiary in Hazelton, West Virginia. Ziyana, his wife, has visited him several times. MacMahon has since moved on, to the defense of Zacarias Moussaoui, the 9/11 accomplice. Ali's appeal is being handled by Jonathan Turley, a constitutional specialist, but authorities have obstructed not only his visits to the prison but my own.

Last March 22, on Turley's motion, the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ordered the trial court, pending final wording, to re-examine the verdict on the grounds of alleged illegal wiretaps of Ali's calls. The order also instructed the trial judge to consider Turley's claim that Ali was being held under unduly harsh conditions and was being denied normal attorney-client contacts. Lawyers for dozens of other Muslims convicted on terrorism charges have also cited illegal intercepts in their appeals. MacMahon, referring to possible illegal wiretaps of the paintball players, put it this way: "The case against a lot of these guys just came out of nowhere, because they were really nobodies, and it makes you wonder."

The court order was among a series of defeats the government has suffered recently in terrorism cases. They include jury acquittals, reversals on appeal, the forced dropping of charges—and even instances of prosecutorial misconduct. Turley, in the event the wiretap strategy fails, will file further motions claiming other irregularities.

These appeals all raise a basic question: whether in post-9/11 America the government, in prosecuting Muslims on terrorism charges, denies them equal protection under the law. On that question, the jury is still out.

Jihad 2.0

Atlantic

By Nadya Labi

6/8

With the loss of training camps in Afghanistan, terrorists have turned to the Internet to find and train recruits. The story of one pioneer of this effort—the enigmatic “Irhabi 007”—shows how

On May 11, 2004, a link to a five-and-a-half-minute video appeared on the Web site Muntada al-Ansar al-Islami, or the Forum of the Islamic Supporters. Announced with the words SHEIKH ABU MUSAB AL-ZARQAWI SLAUGHTERS AN AMERICAN INFIDEL, the video featured the now-notorious beheading of the American contractor Nicholas Berg. Initially sent from a computer that was probably somewhere in Iraq, the video was copied onto Internet sites and within twenty-four hours had been downloaded half a million times. With the slash of a knife, al-Zarqawi had pulled off the most successful online terrorist PR campaign ever.

It was no small feat. A terrorist intent on eluding capture can't simply walk into an Internet café in Baghdad or Fallujah and broadcast a video of his exploits to the world. Once that video is posted online and recognized for what it is, the site carrying it may get shut down by government officials, private hackers, or host servers hoping to avoid public outcry. And even if none of those things happens immediately, the site may receive so much traffic all at once that it simply crashes. Al-Zarqawi's success was possible because he had anticipated the importance of the Internet—an increasingly important weapon in the global terrorist arsenal. Which is where “Irhabi 007” comes in.

Irhabi 007—presumed to be a man, because irhabi in Arabic means “terrorist” and refers to a single male—was first observed in 2003, on two jihadi Web sites. The sites focused on how to commit cyber-crimes, and one of them also disseminated pages of a “jihad encyclopedia—a compendium of violence collected by al-Qaeda in Afghanistan that included detailed instructions on how to use agricultural chemicals as weapons of mass destruction. “I don't know how old he was, or whether he was male or female, but you got the impression of a teenager,” one analyst told me. “Occasionally he used Arabic, but not much, which suggested he might be using a machine translator. He started out as a bit of a loudmouth, one of those cheerleaders who would go around cheerleading global terrorism.”

Those two sites disappeared in 2004, and Irhabi relocated to al-Ansar, the site where the Berg video was posted. In his early days there Irhabi's skill set seemed limited. He posted links to run-of-the-mill articles in English and Arabic, and translated the English headlines into Arabic. An article about al-Qaeda's claim of responsibility for the Madrid train bombings was punctuated with a smiley face; the downing of a U.S. helicopter in Baghdad merited the invocation “God is Great!” Irhabi's enthusiasm, as measured by the abundance of his posts, earned him the computer-generated title of “distinguished member.”

When Irhabi first turned up on the site, a member of the forum suspected that he was accessing Web pages with his personal IP address—a rookie mistake—and warned him to stop. (Every computer on the Internet bears a numerical code, known as an Internet Protocol, or IP, that acts as an “address” for packets of data traveling to and from the host server. An IP identifies the location of a computer, and by extension its owner, just as surely as a return address on an envelope identifies the home of a sender.) Irhabi took the advice and learned fast. Within months he was dispensing advice himself: he provided security tips on how to avoid detection online; distributed anonymizing software that masks a computer’s actual IP address; and emphasized the importance of using a proxy server, which acts as an intermediary between a user and a host server, and can also be used to mask the user’s identity.

Right from the start Irhabi was determined to make himself useful. On the al-Ansar site he posted maps of Israel, Navy SEAL guides on sniper training, CIA manuals on making explosives, and other intelligence that he’d found online, especially if it concerned Iraq. American soldiers stationed in the country had begun writing blogs about their lives there and were posting photos and videos online. Irhabi wanted to mine those blogs for information about U.S. forces in the country—and he realized how effectively that information could be incorporated into the homemade videos that are the lifeblood of online jihadi forums. “I’m looking for soldier footages from within U.S. bases etc.,” he wrote in March 2004. “That’s the fish I want to catch.” (The U.S. military eventually took measures to protect some of the information.) The next month, he pointed a member toward instructions on how to make smoke bombs, and he illegally distributed software on al-Ansar that included tools for hacking, noting that the tools were “quite complex” for “Newbies.” His efforts did not go unrecognized. “The hero,” one member gushed about Irhabi in a typical post. “God salutes you.” To which Irhabi responded, “Hero? I am only half a man now.”

Soon Irhabi’s reach and reputation extended far beyond the al-Ansar community. In the fall of 2005, the Terrorism Research Center—an independent organization, based just outside Washington, D.C., in northern Virginia, whose far-flung experts provide intelligence on global security to governments and private companies—published a report on Irhabi that described him as “heavily involved in maintaining al-Qaeda’s online presence.” The TRC reported that Irhabi had posted videos of beheadings and attacks by insurgent groups in Iraq, as well as clips released by the al-Sahab foundation, considered by many analysts to be al-Qaeda’s production company. It added that Irhabi had registered one of his Web sites under the name, phone number, and address of an American lieutenant deployed in Iraq.

Irhabi was part of a new and growing terrorist vanguard. After 9/11 and the American bombing campaign in Afghanistan, al-Qaeda lost much of its infrastructure. No longer able to recruit in plain sight, its strategists recognized that the Internet could become a vast global recruiting ground—in effect, a new, borderless Afghanistan. The shift of emphasis to online activity, the TRC report asserted, gave al-Qaeda a powerful new means of exercising “command and control over its amorphous network.” And al-Qaeda also realized that in jihadi chat rooms it could find precisely what it most needed to maintain its ranks of recruits and suicide bombers: impressionable young Muslim men (and some women), many of them second-generation immigrants living in the United States and Europe.

As a central figure in this new effort, Irhabi was becoming an asset to terrorists worldwide. One cyber-terrorism consultant, the Irhabi-tracker Evan Kohlmann, went so far as to call him “the AT&T of al-Qaeda.”

As Irhabi worked to build himself up, Aaron Weisburd resolved to take him down. A computer programmer by training, with expertise in Web development, Weisburd began tracking online jihadists in 2002 from his home office in Carbondale, Illinois. When I visited him there this past year, two days before he celebrated Passover, he had hung a giant American flag from a window so that I couldn't miss the house. He lives with his wife, three well-fed cats, and two sick dogs.

Born in New York City in 1964, Weisburd declared his own private war against al-Qaeda because he was mad—mad that Yasir Arafat had rejected the peace plan at Camp David in 2000, mad that al-Qaeda had blown up the buildings in Manhattan he grew up around, and mad because he had read that Hamas was teaching Palestinian kindergartners to hate Israelis. So he set up [Internet Haganah](#), a site designed to put jihadists like Irhabi on the law-enforcement radar screen (haganah is the Hebrew word for “defense,” and a reference to the proto-Israeli army of the 1940s).

Weisburd is the only paid full-time member of Internet Haganah. He runs his operation from the second-floor office of his home. Surrounded by five computers, he trawls online in search of the press statements and videos that terrorists release to rally their supporters. He goes undercover, logging on to restricted forums (if he has been able to get a password) and visiting the many open sites advocating jihad. He doesn't speak Arabic but insists the limitation doesn't slow him down much. Though he relies on translation software at times, and on associates in Internet Haganah's network who speak Arabic, linguistic comprehension isn't his goal. “You're dealing with a group of people who are very demonstrative,” he said. “They're working to make their text look like they feel.” When he finds the terrorist press releases and videos, he works to figure out where they're coming from. Then he either shames service providers into shutting down the sites that host them or gathers what he terms “intel” for interested parties. On Internet Haganah he maintains a blog to rally his own side, providing an outlet for people eager to contribute their time and money to the fight against terrorism. The blog has an added benefit: because Weisburd closely monitors its traffic, he can watch the jihadists watching him.

About a dozen groups in the United States, many of them founded in the wake of 9/11, monitor jihadi chat rooms. They range from the well established (like the TRC and the Search for International Terrorist Entities Institute) to the slightly out there (like the Northeast Intelligence Network) to networks run by solo mavericks like Weisburd and Evan Kohlmann (who works out of his apartment in New York City). Most of the analysts offer consulting services to governments and private clients, and some accept donations. The bigger groups employ Arabic linguists, a scarce and vital resource that can help win lucrative contracts. In a competitive field, Weisburd stands out, not only for his technical expertise but also for his combative approach. Getting Web sites shut down, as Weisburd does, strikes some of his peers as counterproductive, because it complicates surveillance.

In 2004, Weisburd posted entries on Internet Haganah taunting Irhabi that succeeded in getting under the jihadist's skin. “That pig hacked into my machine and destroyed the site,” Irhabi vented shortly after joining al-Ansar. A member of that site who sometimes worked in tandem with Irhabi posted Weisburd's home address,

promising vengeance. "By the way, Aaron," Irhabi wrote a month later, "the new layout of your website looks ... how do i put it? ... SHITTY." Irhabi posted the street address again in June, along with a photo of Weisburd and a copy of a death threat sent to his house. "To the Jewish asshole Aaron Weisburd," it read. "This is our donation to you, either you close the website called Internet Haganah by next week or you will [be] beheaded." This was followed by an image of a laughing face and "p.s. ... I get to keep a finger or an ear . [a] little souvenir. ahahahahaha."

The threat convinced Weisburd that he was doing something right—as did a prior al-Qaeda "denial of service" attack against Internet Haganah, an illegal technique of sending so many requests to a Web site that it crashes. After that attack Weisburd quit his day job and decided to track his tormenters full-time. "The first threat I got was from a leader of al-Qaeda," he said. "Once you internalize a threat like that, it's downhill. A couple of years later, Hamas described me as a 'virus.' I was like: Nice of you to notice, guys."

Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's skill at using the Internet to promote his efforts is unmatched by any of his fellow terrorists—including Osama bin Laden and other leaders of al-Qaeda. Al-Zarqawi pioneered using an online press secretary—someone who, until early this year, when he seems to have faded away, went by the name of Abu Maysara al-Iraqi. Abu Maysara's posts were widely held to be authentic transmissions from al-Zarqawi himself. When Irhabi was first observed online, in 2003, he had no apparent connection to al-Zarqawi's network; he was just a self-starter who applied himself to solving problems. But when Abu Maysara posted links online, Irhabi would often set up mirror links immediately after.

One technique Irhabi used to create such sites was to find vulnerabilities in the File Transfer Protocol (FTP) servers that many organizations use to move cumbersome files around. Unbeknownst to the groups paying for those servers, Irhabi would dump his files there, thus saving the jihadists money and reducing risk. In July 2004, he showed off his prowess by uploading about sixty files, including videos of bin Laden and the 9/11 hijackers, onto an FTP server at the Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department. Then, on al-Ansar, he posted links to the files. "Hurry to download," he warned, anticipating that the files wouldn't stay on the site long. He was right: Laura Mansfield, an analyst then working for the Northeast Intelligence Network, in Erie, Pennsylvania, soon spotted them and had them removed. Though pulled down in less than a day, the files lasted long enough for Irhabi to make a splash in *The Washington Post*. Days later, an al-Ansar member thanked him for all his hard work, referring to him as the "knight of jihadi media," to which Irhabi responded, "haha ... is this the new nickname? I am only the slave of God, the son of the slave of God." Soon, Irhabi's online groupies began tacking "007" onto their own screen names.

In October, Irhabi's place in the jihadi firmament was confirmed when Abu Maysara posted a video of a suicide bombing in Iraq, and Irhabi posted mirrors six minutes later. "Long live the terrorist ... Irhabi 007," Abu Maysara exulted. "By God, your existence gladden[s] me, my beloved brother." Abu Maysara's direct endorsement was a rarity, Kohlmann says, and greatly increased Irhabi's visibility. "Irhabi got the attention of the important people," he adds.

The relationship between Irhabi and al-Zarqawi seems then to have deepened, and by the spring of 2005, Irhabi was playing a central role in al-Zarqawi's PR network. Irhabi started running a host site that Kohlmann believes contained material received

directly from al-Zarqawi's people. If that's true—and it's hard to prove definitively, because copies can be made within seconds—there had to be coordination behind the scenes. Kohlmann discovered what may have been evidence of that coordination when he happened upon a Web site that Irhabi was in the process of building. Irhabi had left open a directory on his server, and Kohlmann found a file that was a draft of a Web site for al-Zarqawi's group, Al-Qaeda in the Land of the Two Rivers. The site never went live. "We know there was communication," Kohlmann said. "We just don't know how much."

Finally, though, Irhabi got too smart for his own good.

In July 2005, using a credit card stolen from someone with a Paris address, Irhabi placed an order with a Web provider in Los Angeles for a domain that consisted of thirty-seven digits, all zeroes and ones. Gregor Loock, who ran the service, processed the \$72.92 order and paid little attention, thinking, Maybe some geek wants a Web site in binary code. Two days later, however, Loock received a request for a domain name with a slightly different string of zeroes and ones—and this time the order was put through on a credit card in the name of a woman in Britain. Suspecting fraud, Loock rejected the order, shut down the earlier account, and started perusing the backup files he'd made of the first site.

Loock's suspicions deepened when he saw the names on some of the ZIP files: Fallujah, Samarra, and other cities he recognized from the news about Iraq. He couldn't read the documents, which were in Arabic, but he could watch the videos. At first they seemed like footage he'd seen on TV about the insurgency, showing American forces under enemy fire. But these videos were different. "One of these martyrs was going to someone in the middle of the night, taping a belt to himself," Loock said. "The man seemed to approach American soldiers, who opened fire, blowing him up." Then it dawned on Loock: these videos were from the attackers' point of view. He proceeded to do what is known as a "reverse DNS lookup," running a trace on the IP addresses that had been used to upload the files, which turned out to come from Saudi Arabia and the United Kingdom.

Loock went to the FBI's Web site, which has a section for tips from the public, and filled out a form. No response. He called and spoke to an agent, who promised that another agent would be in touch. No response. He talked to his brother-in-law, who is in the Navy and forwarded the information to the CIA. No response. Eventually he contacted an agent at the Department of Homeland Security, and, as he put it, "things went pretty fast after that." The agent visited Loock's house with a computer specialist, and Loock handed over everything that he'd discovered: the credit-card numbers that he thought were stolen, the files, and his searches of the IP addresses.

Irhabi had slipped up the year before, too. In July 2004, in setting up a Web site to publish a threat against Italy, Irhabi had picked a service provider that added a time stamp, the identity of the registered user, and the user's IP address whenever files were uploaded. Irhabi wasn't using anonymizing software or a proxy server at the time, and he made the mistake of using the provider at least twice before he stopped. Meanwhile, cyber-jihadists and readers of Internet Haganah began reporting that Irhabi's site was infected with a virus—news that prompted Aaron Weisburd and his associates to look at the pages' source code, the programming language that tells a browser what to do. There they found two IP addresses. Weisburd wrote a blog entry on Internet Haganah publicizing the concern, which exacerbated anxiety among the cyber-jihadists, who keep track of what analysts

write about them. To prove that his computer was clean, Irhabi posted a screen shot of a virus-free run, with his IP address hastily blotted out each of the nearly two dozen times it was listed. One of Weisburd's associates stared at the screen shot, found he could make out a number here and there, and managed to piece together a third IP address. The three addresses Weisburd now had were all different, but each turned out to be only one hop from a router in a London neighborhood known as Ealing. "Frequently, IP addresses are assigned dynamically," Weisburd said, explaining the significance of this discovery. "If you're Irhabi, you disconnect from the router and reconnect, and it reroutes in a way that gives you a new IP address. Irhabi was moving around on this small section of the network." By July, the information had been sent to U.S. and British law enforcement, but to no apparent end. Eventually, in September 2005, Weisburd had had enough. "Irhabi 007 is in Ealing, England," he announced on Internet Haganah. "Or at least that's where the bastard was when we located him (a year and a half ago). Why nothing was done about him then—despite the fact that we had also acquired hundreds of pages from various Islamist forums where Irhabi 007 admitted to committing a broad range of computer crimes—this I cannot tell you." But something was being done.

A month after Weisburd's announcement, a young Swede born in Serbia-Montenegro was arrested in a Sarajevo apartment as he was preparing a suicide attack. The Bosnians called British authorities about the man and his co-conspirators, based on evidence seized during their arrest. Working off that tip, the British police converged on a basement apartment in a quiet, middle-class section of West London, just a few minutes' walk from the Shepherd's Bush tube stop on the Central Line—and only five stops away from Ealing. In the apartment, the police found and arrested Younis Tsouli, a twenty-two-year-old of Moroccan ancestry who lived there with his father.

Last November, New Scotland Yard announced eight charges against Tsouli based in part on what had been found on his computer: video slides about how to make a car bomb, and photos of Washington, D.C., that included an emergency van used to test chemical, radiological, biological, and nuclear material. That evidence, the indictment charged, along with more items discovered at the apartments of two other men (Waseem Mughal and Tariq al-Daour), gave rise to the "reasonable suspicion" that Tsouli was involved in "the commission, preparation or instigation of an act of terrorism"—a rocket bomb attack on an undisclosed location. Tsouli was also charged with conspiracies to commit murder, to cause an explosion, to raise money for terrorist purposes, and to obtain "property belonging to others" with stolen credit cards.

A few months earlier, New Scotland Yard had learned from the Department of Homeland Security about the two stolen credit-card numbers that had been given to Loock to set up the strange sites with names in zeroes and ones. When investigators later entered the credit-card numbers found during their West London raid into their database, the Loock numbers popped up as matches. Tsouli, they realized with excitement, might well be Irhabi 007.

In February one of the terrorist-monitoring groups, the Search for International Terrorist Entities Institute, went public with the claim that Tsouli had been "recently revealed to be the infamous 'Irhabi 007' himself—a hacker whose "teachings and contributions to the jihadi Internet community reigned unparalleled until the summer of 2005." A source close to the case has since discovered that Tsouli, who doesn't speak Arabic fluently, was working in tandem with his alleged co-conspirators, Mughal and al-Daour, and perhaps others. The director and co-founder of SITE, Rita

Katz, noted the volume of Irhabi's posts, many of them "very time-consuming uploads," and the numerous requests he fielded from the al-Ansar community as evidence that "he could not have been a one-man operation."

At a preliminary hearing in May, Tsouli and his fellow suspects appeared by video link from the top-security prison in southeast London where they're being held. Wearing a white T-shirt and jogging pants, Tsouli sat between Mughal and al-Daour, folding his arms over his chest and slouching in his chair. He showed little reaction to the procedural matters being discussed, uncrossing his arms only to muffle his laughter with his hand at something one of his companions said.

For some time yet, Tsouli will remain a distant figure, understood only dimly through the online identity he may have created. His trial has not begun, and British law strictly limits disclosures about ongoing cases. Still, whether Irhabi turns out to have been an individual—Tsouli—or a composite is less important than the legacy he has left behind.

Months after Tsouli's arrest, a member of an English- language jihadi chat room wrote, "I was wondering if anyone knows how to find vulnerabilities on servers or hacking in general (erhabis hacking tips), can they please post in here." He was directed to muslimhackers.com and told to send a private e-mail to the administrator for a password. Muslimhackers offers tips on how to target members of its hit list, which includes Internet Haganah and a number of sites run by Shiites. Since that time, Irhabi's guide to the Internet has also been making the rounds in a number of popular forums; titled "The encyclopedia on hacking the crusaders' and zionists' Web sites, drafted by Irhabi 007," it includes file-transfer programs and the infamous password cracker "John the Ripper," along with its own hit list.

Online jihadists can now do serious damage—and they're learning to stay under the radar. In the early days, before the Iraq War, the "online global jihad" amounted to a collection of chat rooms where angry members could let off steam and experiment with threatening graphics. The sites welcomed visitors, offering a painless process of registration; today they present tougher barriers to entry and place a greater emphasis on remaining anonymous and secure. There are now scores of sites, and the competition among them to become the one to watch is fierce. These sites constitute a sophisticated media machine with which terrorists like Abu Musab al-Zarqawi can shape their image, test their message, and broadcast their news swiftly and securely, often in the form of slick videos. Forum members thrive on the brutal rhetoric and are encouraged to participate in a way that enhances their sense of belonging and importance. That participation poses a threat deeper than propaganda, because it helps terrorists find and train recruits willing to strap themselves into suicide vests and blow themselves up.

The arrest of Younis Tsouli, unfortunately, represents not the end of the story but only its beginning. "Irhabi was the right man at the right time when the terrorists were in need of a robust online network," Katz said. "Today, that network is established. What Irhabi taught the jihadi community is out there." What Irhabi helped create—a template for his own replication online—has opened a door to a struggle that is likely to be with us for a long time. Commenting recently on that struggle, a member of a jihadi forum that Irhabi had frequented captured an essential, if figurative, truth. "By the way brothers," he announced, "Irhabi 007 is free."

UNITED NATIONS

Meet the New Human Rights Council

Weekly Standard

By Suzanne Gershowitz

5/21

ON TUESDAY MAY 9, the United Nations elected members to the new Human Rights Council, among them China, Cuba, and Saudi Arabia. Of the Council's forty-seven members, Freedom House considers almost one out of five to be "unfree." These member countries are: Algeria, Azerbaijan, Cameroon, China, Cuba, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and Tunisia. An additional fourteen Council members are rated only "partly free." So does anyone seriously expect these countries to serve as leaders in the struggle for human rights?

The Human Rights Council, created in April, is governed by different rules than was its predecessor, the Human Rights Commission, which had become a parody of what a human rights body should be. Optimists insisted that, because of these rules-- which, for example, intimidated such former members as Libya and Sudan from even running for election--the new body would be more accountable than the last. General Assembly President Jan Eliasson called the creation of the new Council an "historic occasion" and said that it had the "legitimacy needed for the very important work of human rights."

After the election, the Executive Director of Human Rights Watch, Kenneth Roth, told the New York Times, "The good news is that we did better than expected in the voting because Iran and Venezuela both lost. Venezuela's losing shows that bluster and anti-Americanism isn't enough to get elected." If those were the standards, it's no wonder some see the new body as little better than the last.

But the Human Rights Council promises to make a mockery of itself. According to the State Department's Country Report on Human Rights Practices released in March, China's human rights record is "poor" and getting poorer. The Asian giant increasingly harasses and imprisons those the government perceives as threatening to its authority. Cuba's record is likewise poor. Security forces there are nothing short of brutal in their efforts to stamp out dissent. More than 300 civil society activists remain imprisoned for thought crimes.

Ibrahim Mugaitieb, a human rights monitor in Saudi Arabia, recently wrote that "most Saudis do not even know their rights." In Saudi Arabia, "hundreds and perhaps thousands of people rounded up in security crackdowns languish in prison for months and years without charge or trial. Some are guilty only of receiving an unsolicited text message from an exiled opposition figure."

How can Chinese, Cuban, and Saudi representatives hold other nations to account when they disdain individual rights and ignore rule-of-law at home? Indeed, many have exported their human rights abuses. China, as Khartoum's largest oil client, contributed to genocide in Darfur by supplying the Sudanese government with hard currency. In September 2004, Algeria, China, Pakistan and Russia--now all with seats on the Human Rights Council--were the only Security Council members to abstain from voting on a resolution to address the human rights abuses of Khartoum. China threatened to veto any proposals for an oil-embargo against the criminal

regime.

Human rights agencies and U.S. officials point to the Council's refusal to elect Iran and Venezuela as an important sign of improvement over the former Commission on Human Rights. Though Iran and Venezuela ran for election and lost, they still received significant support from the 191 voters--the members of the General Assembly. Iran earned 58 votes. Venezuela earned 101, pushing it over the two-thirds majority threshold needed for victory, which it might have achieved had its neighbors not garnered even more votes. Better luck next year.

Each country that ran for a seat pledged to uphold the highest standards of human rights as a condition on its membership. Pledges effective when? In the lottery that determined the length of terms for the victors, Azerbaijan, China, Cuba, Russia and Saudi Arabia were lucky enough to pick straws granting them three-year terms--the longest possible, and an eternity for those in political prison.

The United States chose wisely not to run for a seat on the Council so as not to lend it legitimacy. Some critics say the American position on human rights is hypocritical at best, pointing to Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib as examples of U.S. human rights abuses. But moral equivalency falls flat. In the United States, human rights activists can press their case in the courts--let the better argument win. In Cuba, China, and Saudi Arabia, such matters are resolved in grimmer ways.

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U.N. Reformed

National Review

By Anne Bayefsky

5/24

Ambassador John Bolton will appear before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations Thursday morning to be asked the \$64,000 question: Following years of death-defying scandals, has the U.N. reformed? The answer will leave Congress with the follow-up: If not, what ought to be the consequences for U.S. financial contributions to the failing organization?

Secretary-General Kofi Annan has headed the U.N. through years of controversy that have made their way into the consciousness of the average American taxpayer, who is, after all, paying for 22 percent of the skullduggery. The dullness of the average U.N. meeting has finally been outweighed by the enormity of the transgressions: billions of dollars stolen by Saddam Hussein through a U.N.-monitored scheme; U.N. peacekeepers that raped their wards; genocide that wasn't stopped, or even named, by an organization premised on "never again"; nuclear weapons proliferation with impunity; human rights thugs on its lead human-rights body; grossly inadequate financial management and oversight; a bloated secretariat rife with duplication of mandates and responsibilities.

Into this morass came Ambassador Bolton, a no-nonsense, straight-talking foreign-policy expert, unswervingly dedicated to serving American interests--namely, to ensure that taxpayer dollars were wisely invested and that the causes of democracy, justice, and peace were well-served. It was August 2005 and the U.N. was in the

throes of "reform," as Annan tried desperately to save himself from the judgment of history, if not Congress. Bolton's appointment came too late to do much about the outcome of the U.N. reform summit of world leaders which took place in September 2005. The summit document was as vague, ambiguous, and contradictory as the diplomats could make it while pretending it was a serious map for a real overhaul. The fact that it was hailed by dictators, despots, and democrats alike is enlightening.

Nevertheless, the next nine months did engender a slew of reform negotiations over a broad range of subjects. Part way through the process came the thorny issue of the approval of the 2006-7 U.N. budget. Ambassador Bolton, with congressional leaders looking over his shoulder, put his finger in the dike. In December 2005, the General Assembly made a unique decision not to rubber-stamp a two-year budget in the absence of tangible progress on reform. An allotment of \$950 million, which was roughly equivalent to one-quarter of the budget--meaning an end of June 2006 expiration date--was approved. The rest of the money would be subject to a further approval process, although the precise conditions were deliberately avoided.

So here we are, only a few weeks before the U.N. runs out of money, and Congress set to answer the question of whether the reforms to date are sufficient to warrant the remaining three-quarters of the \$3.8 billion budget. The easy way out is also the most familiar. The standard State Department response in the face of the mounting crisis of confidence in this organization is to call the glass half-full. The lines are familiar: We need the U.N. It's the only global multilateral body. It's better to keep talking. We're not perfect either. U.S. hegemony needs correction.

But if ever there was a time to resist the temptation for obfuscation and timidity, it is now. No doubt, we are all cognizant of our global interdependence, which ought to be accompanied by mutual concern and responsibility. That very duty, however, brings with it the necessity of giving an honest answer to the \$64,000 question the Senate is about to pose. If Secretary Rice resists the temptation to manufacture the usual, artificially upbeat spin, the facts will speak for themselves.

The new Human Rights Council, which replaces the discredited Human Rights Commission as the U.N.'s lead human-rights body, now seats some of the world's worst human-rights abusers firmly on the inside. China, Cuba, Russia and Saudi Arabia are among its members. The controlling 55 percent of the Council's votes are in the hands of the Asian and African regional groups, and the election handed a 62-percent interest in those groups to the members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference. Issuing human-rights abusers a new license to judge human rights abuse is not successful reform.

On management reform, the situation has gone completely off the rails. Annan put a minimal reform package on the table that attempted to wrestle some control from the General Assembly majority which pays a small fraction of the U.N.'s costs. In response, for the first time in 19 years, that same majority forced a vote in the U.N.'s budget committee and sidelined the reform effort. The 50 countries that voted in the minority pay 87 percent of the U.N.'s dues.

On preventing genocide, the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights appointed a Palestinian as executive director of a Commission of Inquiry on Darfur. Not surprisingly, the 2005 Commission's report refused to identify the millions of dead and displaced as an instance of genocide. The commission was loathe to label Darfur an ethnic or racial conflict between Arab militia and non-Arab victim. This pre-

summit failure, along with Sudanese intransigence and African Union reservations, contributed to the continuing spectacle of U.N. troops remaining on the sidelines despite the carnage.

On stopping nuclear proliferation, the International Atomic Energy Agency decided three years ago that Iran had violated the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and associated legal obligations. And still the Security Council has yet to adopt a single resolution finding Iranian action to be a threat to international peace and security, let alone adopt serious sanctions before it's too late. Rooting all along for the Iranians, the Chinese, and the Russians have been the head of the U.N.'s nuclear watchdog, Mohamed ElBaradei, and Annan himself, both of whom have repeatedly sought to scuttle Security Council resolve. Meanwhile, Iran was elected a vice-chair of the U.N. Disarmament Commission.

On so-called mandate review, Annan dumped a list of thousands of mandates of U.N. entities into the lap of U.N. members with no recommendations for streamlining and elimination. He apparently figured there was no reason to take the heat for pointing out the obvious anomalies, such as: there is one U.N. Division within the secretariat for Palestinians and another Division for everyone else in the Asian and Pacific region; there are two refugee agencies, one for Palestinians and one for every other refugee; there are two U.N. human rights websites and databases, one for Palestinians and one for everybody else; there are two parts to the Department of Public Information, one devoted to Palestinians and one for all other subjects. U.N. member states have barely started to discuss the details of Annan's list.

On terrorism, the U.N. is no closer to a definition. The gulf is so great on the question of which women and children are legitimate targets that Western states are now agreeing that the issue is best set aside in the name of "progress" on other fronts, such as giving technical advice to allegedly hapless developing nations. In the meantime, the drafters of a comprehensive convention against terrorism can't agree on their next meeting date. And Annan's new counter-terrorism report is in the middle of a war of words being waged in "informal consultations" about the root causes of terrorism, or the underlying evils that drive unfortunates to blow up themselves along with as many Americans, British, Iraqis, or Israelis as possible.

Aside from the reform pastime, there are the daily realities of U.S. life at the U.N. As monitored by EYEontheUN.org, of all the votes cast in the fall 2005 General Assembly, the U.S. was in the minority 77 percent of the time. Furthermore, having reviewed every 2005 U.N. document, report, and resolution critical of human-rights records of specific states, EYEontheUN.org found that the country subject to the most U.N. condemnations was Israel, while the U.S. was ninth--equal to Afghanistan (see graphs here). Countries subject to less U.N. condemnation for human rights abuse than the U.S. included China (11th), Iran (17th), and Cuba (25th).

Among the drops of water sitting in the bottom of the glass (and in danger of evaporation) are the following. A peace-building commission to assist in post-conflict situations has been created and its organizational committee was finally chosen May 16. A new ethics office has been established, along with new rules explaining ethical behavior to the U.N. secretariat. The rules include reducing the maximum amount for undisclosed gifts, to a selected 1,300 U.N. staffers, from \$10,000 to \$250. Since then, the secretary-general accepted a disclosed \$500,000 prize from the U.N. member state of Dubai. This incident raised serious questions about conflicts of interest, among them being the fact that a judge on the panel awarding the prize

was subsequently named to head the U.N. Environment Program (see an NRO article on this here). A U.N. Democracy Fund, first proposed by President Bush in 2004, has been established. But little more than a dozen states have made or promised contributions, totaling to less than \$50 million, close to half of which is from the U.S. alone.

Congress and the administration are therefore squarely faced with the follow-up question--the financial consequences for the failures of U.N. reform. It may be, however, that an administration desperate for U.N. Security Council approval of any Iran strategy will pull Ambassador Bolton's finger out of the dike.

This would be a serious mistake. The story of the failure of U.N. reform is not one of bad-luck or bad-timing, which may improve down the road. The U.N. is a body of 191 states, less than half of which are fully free according to Freedom House. It is essentially controlled by the 132-strong G-77, a group of developing nations that believe development trumps democracy. The largest single block within the G-77 is the group composed of 56 Islamic states. The U.S. and its democratic allies are simply outnumbered. In the Security Council, where the U.S. holds a veto power, the American role is most often defensive. Proactive efforts in modern times to condemn and sanction states posing the greatest threat to peace and security have largely been thwarted.

The straight goods on U.N. "reform" tomorrow would be an important first step in redirecting U.S. foreign policy away from the game of U.N. reform to the design of an effective multilateral institution that meets the needs of democracy in the 21st century.

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POLITICS & POLICY

The Tipping Points

Foreign Affairs

By Daniel Yankelovich

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Summary: A new survey of U.S. public opinion on foreign policy shows that the war in Iraq and terrorism are not the only problems on Americans' minds. Public concern over the United States' dependence on foreign oil may soon force policymakers to change course. And religious Americans are rethinking their support for many of Bush's policies, which has brought them closer in line with the rest of the public.

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FROM BAD TO WORSE

Terrorism and the war in Iraq are not the only sources of the American public's anxiety about U.S. foreign policy. Americans are also concerned about their country's dependence on foreign energy supplies, U.S. jobs moving overseas, Washington's

seeming inability to stop illegal immigration, and a wide range of other issues. The public's support for promoting democracy abroad has also seriously eroded.

These are a few of the highlights from the second in a continuing series of surveys monitoring Americans' confidence in U.S. foreign policy conducted by the nonprofit research organization Public Agenda (with support from the Ford Foundation), of which I am chair. The first survey, conducted in June of last year, found that only the war in Iraq had reached the "tipping point" -- the moment at which a large portion of the public begins to demand that the government address its concerns. According to this follow-on survey, conducted among a representative sample of 1,000 American adults in mid-January 2006, a second issue has reached that status. The U.S. public has grown impatient with U.S. dependence on foreign countries for oil, and its impatience could soon translate into a powerful demand that Washington change its policies.

Overall, the public's confidence in U.S. foreign policy has drifted downward since the first survey. On no issue did the government's policy receive an improved rating from the public in January's survey, and on a few the ratings changed for the worse. The public has become less confident in Washington's ability to achieve its goals in Iraq and Afghanistan, hunt down terrorists, protect U.S. borders, and safeguard U.S. jobs. Fifty-nine percent of those surveyed said they think that U.S. relations with the rest of the world are on the wrong track (compared to 37 percent who think the opposite), and 51 percent said they are disappointed by the country's relations with other countries (compared to 42 percent who are proud of them).

As for the goal of spreading democracy to other countries, only 20 percent of respondents identified it as "very important" -- the lowest support noted for any goal asked about in the survey. Even among Republicans, only three out of ten favored pursuing it strongly. In fact, most of the erosion in confidence in the policy of spreading democracy abroad has occurred among Republicans, especially the more religious wing of the party. People who frequently attend religious services have been among the most ardent supporters of the government's policies, but one of the recent survey's most striking findings is that although these people continue to maintain a high level of trust in the president and his administration, their support for the government's Iraq policy and for the policy of exporting democracy has cooled.

WHAT MATTERS, AND WHY

A question always hovers in the background whenever public attitudes on foreign policy are reported: What influence do shifts in such attitudes have on the actual day-to-day conduct of foreign policy? Unlike for domestic policy, where it is clear that public opinion is always relevant, for foreign policy it is often difficult to understand whether changes in public opinion lead to changes on the ground.

The reason for this murkiness is that the public grants the president and Congress far more authority for decision-making on foreign policy than on domestic affairs. Americans assume that the president and his advisers have special information about international relations to which they are not privy. Some Americans may also lack confidence in their ability to judge the wisdom of particular foreign policies. All of this translates into a good deal of leeway for policymakers. Still, the public puts limits on this freedom and sometimes takes it away abruptly. Under certain conditions, public opinion can have a decisive influence. The trick is understanding what those conditions are.

In mid-2005, we found that in addition to the war in Iraq, three other issues were moving toward the tipping point, where public opinion would become strong enough to influence policy. These issues were the outsourcing of jobs to other countries, illegal immigration, and the United States' deteriorating relations with the Muslim world. Based on the January survey, concern over outsourcing and illegal immigration has grown a bit more intense, and the worry about the growing hatred of the United States in Muslim countries has modestly receded. On the other hand, U.S. dependence on foreign energy sources, which was not an urgent issue in mid-2005, has leapt to the forefront of the public's consciousness.

In studies that track attitudes, there are always more views that do not change than views that do. This survey is no exception. It is a striking -- and encouraging -- illustration of the public's thoughtfulness and consistency. Respondents still awarded the government high marks (an A or a B) on its performance in achieving foreign policy goals such as helping other nations when natural disasters strike and making sure the United States has a strong and well-supplied military. Respondents continued to believe that the government deserves intermediate ratings on its efforts to make peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians and help improve the lives of people in the developing world. And respondents still gave the government failing grades on issues such as stopping the importation of illegal drugs. This context of overall stability makes any changes in opinion that the survey did find all the more striking and significant.

The war in Iraq, already at the tipping point in mid-2005, remains the primary foreign policy issue on which public pressure continues to mount. Although illegal immigration and outsourcing moved closer to the tipping point in the January 2006 poll, neither has actually reached it. In contrast, the public's concern over U.S. relations with the Muslim world moved slightly away from the tipping point. And the issue of energy dependence, which had ranked far down the list, leapfrogged ahead to move into tipping-point territory.

No change is more striking than that relating to the public's opinion of U.S. dependence on foreign oil. Americans have grown much more worried that problems abroad may affect the price of oil. The proportion of those who said they "worry a lot" about this occurring has increased from 42 percent to 55 percent. Nearly nine out of ten Americans asked were worried about the problem -- putting oil dependence at the top of our 18-issue "worry scale." Virtually all Americans surveyed (90 percent) said they see the United States' lack of energy independence as jeopardizing the country's security, 88 percent said they believe that problems abroad could endanger the United States' supply of oil and so raise prices for U.S. consumers, and 85 percent said they believe that the U.S. government would be capable of doing something about the problem if it tried. This last belief may be the reason that only 20 percent of those surveyed gave the government an A or a B on this issue; three-quarters assigned the government's performance a C, a D, or an F.

The oil-dependency issue now meets all the criteria for having reached the tipping point: an overwhelming majority expresses concern about the issue, the intensity of the public's unease has reached significant levels, and the public believes the government is capable of addressing the issue far more effectively than it has until now. Should the price of gasoline drop over the coming months, this issue may temporarily lose some of its political weight. But with supplies of oil tight and geopolitical tensions high, public pressure is likely to grow.

The only other issue that has reached the tipping point is the war in Iraq. It continues to be the foreign policy issue foremost in the public's mind, and respondents consistently deem the war (along with the threat of terrorism) to be the most important problem facing the United States in its dealings with the rest of the world. Concern about mounting U.S. casualties in Iraq is particularly widespread -- 82 percent of respondents to the June 2005 survey said they cared deeply about the issue; in January 2006, 83 percent said they did. Although the level and intensity of concern about Iraq has remained fairly stable, the public's appraisal of how well the United States is meeting its objectives there has eroded slightly. Last summer, 39 percent of respondents gave the government high marks on this issue; 33 percent did in January. The erosion, moreover, comes almost entirely from Republicans: 61 percent gave the government an A or a B on Iraq in the first survey, but only 53 percent did in the second. Confidence in U.S. policy on Iraq is also down significantly among those who regularly attend religious services, who also show rising levels of concern about casualties.

One reason for the downward trend is skepticism about how truthful Washington has been about the reasons for invading Iraq. Fifty percent of respondents said they feel that they were misled -- the highest level of mistrust measured in the survey. Another source of skepticism may be more troublesome for the government: only 22 percent of Americans surveyed said they feel that their government has the ability to create a democracy in Iraq.

WHAT'S ON DECK

Three other issues are approaching the tipping point but have not yet reached it: the outsourcing of jobs, illegal immigration, and U.S. relations with the rest of the world, and especially Muslim countries.

An impressive 87 percent of respondents expressed some degree of concern about outsourcing, 52 percent said they "worry a lot" about it, and 81 percent of respondents gave the government poor grades (a C, a D, or an F) on its handling of the issue. Thus, outsourcing now meets two of the three criteria for reaching the tipping point. But it falls short on the third criterion, the ability of the government to take effective action on the issue. Most Americans surveyed (74 percent) felt that it was unlikely that U.S. companies would keep jobs in the country when labor is cheaper elsewhere. And 52 percent of respondents believed it was unrealistic to think that the government could do anything to stop corporations from sending jobs abroad. On the other hand, a large plurality (44 percent) said they believe the U.S. government could do a lot to prevent jobs from moving overseas if it really tried. Should this plurality become a majority -- which we suspect will happen during 2006 -- outsourcing will have reached the tipping point.

Concern about illegal immigration has also grown. Two out of five Americans surveyed (41 percent) said they "worry a lot" about this issue, and half (50 percent) said they believe that tighter controls on immigration would greatly enhance U.S. security. Almost half (48 percent) also said they believe the government could do a lot to slow illegal immigration, and respondents gave Washington even lower grades on protecting U.S. borders in the most recent survey than they did in mid-2005.

Interestingly, the public's feelings on a third issue have moved in the opposite direction. This issue is the intangible but important question of U.S. relations with the rest of the world, and specifically with Muslim countries. During the period between the two surveys, the U.S. public grew marginally less worried about anti-

Americanism in the Muslim world and elsewhere. The number of respondents who said they "worry a lot" about growing hatred of the United States in the Muslim world decreased from 40 percent to 34 percent, and the share of those who were deeply concerned about losing the trust of people in other countries declined from 40 percent to 29 percent, one of the larger changes in the survey. The reasons for these changes are not self-evident. The sense of shame about the treatment of prisoners at Abu Ghraib, so strong in 2005, seems to have receded with the passage of time.

Only about a third of Americans surveyed (35 percent) said they think the U.S. government could do a lot to establish good relations with moderate Muslims -- but almost two-thirds (64 percent) nevertheless gave the government poor marks because of its failure to do so. We expect opinions on this issue to be volatile in the future. Nearly a third of respondents said they "worry a lot" about the rise of Islamic extremism around the world (31 percent) and the possibility that U.S. actions in the Middle East have aided the recruitment of terrorists (33 percent). Almost half (45 percent) said they believe that Islam encourages violence, and survey respondents estimated that about half or more of all Muslims in the world are anti-American. But a clear majority (56 percent) continued to have confidence that improved communications with the Muslim world would reduce hatred of the United States.

Americans may also be getting used to the once-shocking notion that they are not well loved abroad. A majority of respondents (65 percent) have realized that the rest of the world sees the United States in a negative light. When Americans are asked to describe the image of the United States in other countries, the results show a great deal of ambivalence and confusion. Even though a majority said they believe the United States is seen negatively, large majorities ascribed positive elements to the country's image abroad. Four out of five respondents said they think the United States is seen as "a free and democratic country" (81 percent) and "a country of opportunity for everyone" (80 percent). Nearly as many said they believe the United States is seen as generous to other countries (72 percent) and as a strong leader (69 percent). But equal numbers said the United States is seen as "arrogant" (74 percent), "pampered and spoiled" (73 percent), "a bully" (63 percent), and a "country to be feared" (63 percent).

UNITY AND DIVISION

The U.S. public holds a strikingly clear view of what Washington's foreign policy priorities should be. The goals the public highlights range widely. Those that receive the most public support are helping other nations when they are struck by natural disasters (71 percent), cooperating with other countries on problems such as the environment and disease control (70 percent), and supporting UN peacekeeping (69 percent). A surprisingly high level of support shows up for goals that represent the United States' humanitarian (as distinct from its political) ideals, such as improving the treatment of women in other countries (57 percent), helping people in poor countries get an education (51 percent), and helping countries move out of poverty (40 percent). Receiving less support are goals such as encouraging U.S. businesses to invest in poor countries (22 percent). And receiving the least support is "actively creating democracies in other countries" (20 percent).

Not surprisingly, there are partisan differences over what the United States' goals should be. The largest gap between Republicans and Democrats relates to "initiating military force only when we have the support of our allies." Almost two-thirds of Democrats surveyed (64 percent) endorsed this multilateralist principle, in contrast to slightly more than a third of Republicans (36 percent). There are no significant

differences between Republicans and Democrats on humanitarian ideals. The parties do differ, however, on the desirability of promoting democracy in other countries (30 percent of Republicans surveyed supported this goal, compared to only 16 percent of Democrats). But even a majority of Republicans have little stomach for this priority of the Bush administration.

This last point merits some elaboration. A majority of the U.S. public supports the ideal of spreading democracy (53 percent of respondents said they believe that "when more countries become democratic there will be less conflict"), but Americans are skeptical that an activist U.S. policy can contribute much to this outcome. A majority of those surveyed (58 percent) said they feel that "democracy is something that countries only come to on their own." As such skepticism grows, support for trying to create democracies abroad declines. In the 2005 survey, 50 percent of respondents thought that the United States was doing well at that task; in the more recent survey, the number fell to 46 percent, and only 22 percent said they believe that Washington can do a lot to build a democratic Iraq.

The 2005 survey described the huge gap that divided Republicans and Democrats on most aspects of foreign policy. The most recent survey found that partisan differences remain pronounced. The gap between the parties is at its widest with regard to how the United States is doing in its foreign policy and how much the Bush administration can be trusted. The most striking difference is in the expression of pride in the nation's foreign policy, with a whopping 58-point spread between the percentage of Republicans and the percentage of Democrats who believe that there is "plenty to be proud of" in U.S. dealings with the world. Essentially, Republicans think the country is doing well in foreign policy, whereas Democrats think it is failing miserably.

But digging into the numbers reveals that although Republicans generally endorse the country's current foreign policy, they share with Democrats a critical appraisal on a number of specific issues. Both groups are reluctant to give an A or a B to the government for its efforts to stop illegal immigration, achieve energy independence, block drugs from entering the country, limit the extent of foreign debt, or negotiate beneficial trade agreements.

BACK TO THE FOLD?

The first survey showed a remarkable parallel between the views of Republican respondents and the views of those respondents who said they frequently attend religious services. (By "religious services," we mean services of any kind -- in churches, synagogues, mosques, or elsewhere.) The second survey showed reduced enthusiasm for some of the administration's policies among devoted service attendees, especially regarding the war in Iraq. In fact, most of the erosion in confidence in the government's foreign policy in the seven months between the two surveys came from this source. Although there are still striking differences between the views of Americans who do not attend religious services frequently and the views of those who do, the gap has started to narrow, suggesting reduced polarization on the basis of religion.

In the first survey, a minority of frequent attendees at religious services (45 percent) expressed serious worry about casualties in Iraq, compared to 56 percent of the total sample. Now that number has increased to 52 percent, closer to the proportion of the population as a whole, which has remained at 56 percent. Although people who frequently attend religious services are still the respondents most supportive of U.S.

policy in Iraq, fewer of them (41 percent of those surveyed) gave a high grade to the government on meeting U.S. objectives there than did seven months earlier (46 percent). In the first survey, 32 percent of those who frequently attend religious services said they worried a lot that the war in Iraq was taking up too much money and attention; in January, 40 percent did. Almost half of those surveyed in June 2005 (48 percent) said they believed that the United States could help other countries become democracies; in January, that number had dropped to 37 percent, in line with the 36 percent of the general population. And in the more recent surveys only 46 percent agreed that the United States was "generally doing the right thing" in its relations with the rest of the world, down from 52 percent in the earlier survey.

These are not big changes, but they follow a consistent pattern, suggesting that the most actively religious Americans are starting to react more like the rest of the public. This conclusion is supported by the results of the broad overview question asking whether U.S. foreign policy is going in the right or the wrong direction: 57 percent of those who frequently attend religious services said the latter in January, matching the 58 percent of the rest of the population who said this. Still, despite the mounting reservations of actively religious Americans about some policies, a majority (54 percent) continue to trust the government to tell them the truth about the country's relations with others, in contrast to the 37 percent of respondents who do not frequently attend religious services.

A recent survey of public opinion in Arab countries, conducted in late 2005 by Zogby International and University of Maryland Professor Shibley Telhami, showed results that are dismaying from the United States' point of view, with large majorities believing that the war with Iraq will make Iraqis worse off and the region less peaceful, breed more terrorism, and worsen the prospects for settling the Arab-Israeli dispute. Comparably large majorities said they consider U.S. foreign policies to be driven not by a desire to spread democracy, but by oil, a quest to dominate the Middle East, the goal of protecting Israel, or a desire to weaken the Muslim world.

Nevertheless, one ray of light shines through. Asked what the primary motivation for Bush's Middle East policy is, only 13 percent of those Arabs surveyed in the Zogby/Telhami poll cited "the need to spread ... Christian religious convictions"; most (61 percent) chose instead "the pursuit of [the United States'] national interest." Why does this offer grounds for hope? Because our most recent survey showed that the religious divide over U.S. foreign policy seems to be narrowing, and the Zogby/Telhami survey revealed a similar finding: that the Arab world sees secular, rather than religious, motivations as crucial to U.S. foreign policy. However difficult differences rooted in interests might be to solve, and however long it might take to solve them, clashes rooted in identity and religion are even more problematic and take far longer to surmount.

Stop Coddling Despots

Weekly Standard

By Max Boot

5/10

DURING HIS FIRST four years in office, President Bush made impressive strides toward achieving the improbable goal laid out in his second inaugural address-- "ending tyranny in our world." American troops liberated 50 million people and midwived representative governments in Afghanistan and Iraq. The United States

also provided important support to peaceful uprisings in Ukraine, Georgia, Lebanon and Kyrgyzstan.

The ripples of those revolutions reverberated throughout the greater Middle East, long the major breeding ground of anti-Western terrorism. At a minimum, tyrants felt compelled to pay lip service to American demands that they curtail support for terrorism and show greater respect for human rights. Syria's Bashar Assad pulled his occupation army out of Lebanon; Hosni Mubarak promised to hold genuine electoral contests in Egypt; the Saudi royal family deigned to hold elections for municipal councils.

In the last year, however, the global momentum for democratization has palpably slowed and in some places reversed course altogether. Vladimir V. Putin has crushed all competing centers of power in Russia. Belarus, the only other dictatorship left in Europe, held fraudulent elections that confirmed Alexander G. Lukashenko's death grip on power. The same thing happened in Kazakhstan, where president-for-life Nursultan A. Nazarbayev claimed to have won more than 90% of the vote. Next door in Uzbekistan, security forces gunned down hundreds of unarmed protesters in the city of Andijan and then tried to cover up the massacre.

The same worrisome trend is observable in the Middle East. The Iranian ayatollahs have stepped up their campaign of torturing, jailing and executing dissidents. The Assad regime has arrested more opposition figures at home and continues to intimidate anti-Syrian activists in Lebanon. And, most glaring of all, modern-day pharaoh Mubarak has imprisoned his leading liberal opponent and renewed the draconian "emergency law" that allows indefinite detention of anyone who challenges his rule.

What's going on? Well, no one--not even Bush--ever said that the course of liberty would be smooth and easy. Entrenched elites have an obvious incentive to resist giving up power, and they now feel free to do so because they think that Bush, a lame-duck president with approval ratings in the low 30s, is too feeble to resist.

The despots reckon, not without reason, that they can simply wait out the current occupant of the White House. They know that the odds of vigorous action from the United States are slim given how many U.S. troops are tied down in Afghanistan and Iraq. The continuing turmoil in Iraq and Hamas' takeover of the Palestinian Authority--signs of the supposed dangers of too much freedom--provide further pretexts for repression.

In his remaining 986 days in office, Bush has a choice: Either he can sit back and allow the resurgence of the dictators, or he can fight back with the considerable power still at his command. His recent decision to grant a coveted White House reception to Ilham Aliyev isn't a good sign because the president of oil-rich Azerbaijan blatantly rigged his nation's parliamentary elections just six months ago. If Bush wants to show that he is still serious about promoting "the expansion of freedom," he could begin by making an example of Egypt.

Mubarak is reputedly one of Washington's closest friends in the Arab world, yet he has been among the most brazen in defying Bush's demands for greater openness while force-feeding his 78 million subjects a steady diet of anti-American and anti-Semitic drivel. His vow to hold multiparty presidential elections produced a suspect ballot last fall in which he secured 88% of a feeble turnout. Afterward, he consigned

his chief challenger, Ayman Nour, to five years' hard labor on trumped-up charges of forging signatures to qualify for the ballot. The subsequent parliamentary election was even more dubious; ruling party goons used violence and fraud to keep the Muslim Brotherhood, the main opposition group, from winning too many seats. Now Mubarak's minions are roughing up peaceful demonstrators who support brave judges in their demand for greater independence and less electoral fraud.

Why, oh why, is this repugnant regime still getting \$2 billion a year in American subsidies? Take the money away from Mubarak and give it to democracy-promotion programs across the Middle East. That would be a shot heard 'round the world. Failing such a signal, the dictators will become bolder and more brazen in defying what Bush once called "the nonnegotiable demands of human dignity."

Max Boot is a contributing editor to The Weekly Standard and a columnist for the Los Angeles Times. This column originally appeared in the May 10, 2006 edition of the Los Angeles Times.

Anti-Anti-Americanism

National Review

By Victor Davis Hanson

5/19

How does the United States deal with a corrupt world in which we are blamed even for the good we do, while others are praised when they do wrong or remain indifferent to suffering?

We are accused of unilateral and preemptory bullying of the madman Mr. Ahmadinejad, whose reactors that will be used to "wipe out" the "one-bomb" state of Israel were supplied by Swiss, German, and Russian profit-minded businessmen. No one thinks to chastise those who sold Iran the capability of destroying Israel.

Here in the United States we worry whether we are tough enough with the Gulf sheikdoms in promoting human rights and democratic reform. Meanwhile China simply offers them cash for oil, no questions asked. Fidel Castro and Hugo Chavez pose as anti-Western zealots to Western naifs. The one has never held an election; the other tries his best to end the democracy that brought him to power. Meanwhile our fretting elites, back from Europe or South America, write ever more books on why George Bush and the Americans are not liked.

Hamas screams that we are mean for our logical suggestion that free American taxpayers will not subsidize such killers and terrorists. Those in the Middle East whine about Islamophobia, but keep silent that there is not allowed a Sunni mosque in Iran or a Christian church in Saudi Arabia. An entire book could be written about the imams and theocrats--in Iran, Egypt, the West Bank, Pakistan, and the Gulf States--who in safety issue fatwas and death pronouncements against Americans in Iraq and any who deal with the "infidel," and yet send their spoiled children to private schools in Britain and the United States, paid for by their own blackmail money from corrupt governments.

You get the overall roundup: the Europeans have simply absorbed as their own the key elements of ossified French foreign policy--utopian rhetoric and anti-

Americanism can pretty much give you a global pass to sell anything you wish to anyone at anytime.

China is more savvy. It discards every disastrous economic policy Mao ever enacted, but keeps two cornerstones of Maoist dogma: imply force to bully, and keep the veneer of revolutionary egalitarianism to mask cutthroat capitalism and diplomacy, from copyright theft and intellectual piracy to smiling at rogue clients like North Korea and disputing the territorial claims of almost every neighbor in sight.

Oil cuts a lot of idealism in the Middle East. The cynicism is summed up simply as "Those who sell lecture, and those who buy listen." American efforts in Iraq--the largest aid program since the Marshall Plan, where American blood and treasure go to birth democracy--are libeled as "no blood for oil." Yet a profiteering Saudi Arabia or Kuwait does more to impoverish poor oil-importing African and Asian nations than any regime on earth. But this sick, corrupt world keeps mum.

And why not ask Saudi Arabia about its now lionized and well-off al-Ghamdi clan? Aside from the various Ghamdi terrorists and bin-Laden hangers-on, remember young Ahmad, the 20-year-old medical student who packed his suicide vest with ball bearings and headed for Mosul, where he blew up 18 Americans? Or how about dear Ahmad and Hamza, the Ghamdis who helped crash Flight 175 into the South Tower on September 11? And please do not forget either the Saudi icon Said Ghamdi, who, had he not met Todd Beamer and Co. on Flight 93, would have incinerated the White House or the Capitol.

So we know the symptoms of this one-sided anti-Americanism and its strange combination of hatred, envy, and yearning--but, so far, not its remedy. In the meantime, the global caricature of the United States, in the aftermath of Iraq, is proving near fatal to the Bush administration, whose idealism and sharp break with past cynical realpolitik have earned it outright disdain. Indeed, the more al Qaeda is scattered, and the more Iraq looks like it will eventually emerge as a constitutional government, the angrier the world seems to become at the United States. American success, it seems, is even worse than failure.

Some of the criticism is inevitable. America is in an unpopular reconstruction of Iraq that has cost lives and treasure. Observers looked only at the explosions, never what the sacrifice was for--especially when it is rare for an Afghan or Iraqi ever to visit the United States to express thanks for giving their peoples a reprieve from the Taliban and Saddam Hussein.

We should also accept that the United States, as the world's policeman, always suffers the easy hatred of the cops, who are as ankle-bitten when things are calm as they are desperately sought when danger looms. America is the genitor and largest donor to the United Nations. Its military is the ultimate guarantor of free commerce by land and sea, and its wide-open market proves the catalyst of international trade. More immigrants seek its shores than all other designations combined--especially from countries of Latin America, whose criticism of the United States is the loudest.

Nevertheless, while we cannot stop anti-Americanism, here (a consequence, in part, of a deep-seeded, irrational sense of inferiority) and abroad, we can adopt a wiser stance that puts the onus of responsibility more on our critics.

We have a window of 1 to 3 years in Iran before it deploys nuclear weapons. Let

Ahmadinejad talk and write--the loonier and longer, the better, as we smile and ignore him and his monstrous ilk.

Let also the Europeans and Arabs come to us to ask our help, as sphinx-like we express "concern" for their security needs. Meanwhile we should continue to try to appeal to Iranian dissidents, stabilize Iraq and Afghanistan, and resolve that at the eleventh hour this nut with his head in a well will not obtain the methods to destroy what we once knew as the West.

Ditto with Hamas. Don't demonize it--just don't give it any money. Praise democracy, but not what was elected.

We should curtail money to Mr. Mubarak as well. No need for any more sermons on democracy--been there, done that. Now we should accept with quiet resignation that if an aggregate \$50 billion in give-aways have earned us the most anti-American voices in the Middle East, then a big fat zero for Egypt might be an improvement. After all, there must be something wrong with a country that gave us both Mohammad Atta and Dr. Zawahiri.

The international Left loves to champion humanitarian causes that do not involve the immediate security needs of the United States, damning us for inaction even as they are the first to slander us for being military interventionists. We know the script of Haiti, Mogadishu, and the Balkans, where Americans are invited in, and then harped at both for using and not using force. Where successful, the credit goes elsewhere; failure is always ours alone. Still, we should organize multinational efforts to save those in Darfur--but only after privately insisting that every American soldier must be matched by a European, Chinese, and Russian peacekeeper.

There are other ways to curb our exposure to irrational hatred that seems so to demoralize the American public. First, we should cease our Olympian indifference to hypocrisy, instead pointing out politely inconsistencies in European, Middle Eastern, and Chinese morality. Why not express more concern about the inexplicable death of Balkan kingpin prisoners at The Hague or European sales of nuclear technology to madmen or institutionalized Chinese theft of intellectual property?

We need to reexamine the nature of our overseas American bases, elevating the political to the strategic, which, it turns out, are inseparable after all. To take one small example: When Greeks pour out on their streets to rage at a visiting American secretary of State, we should ask ourselves, do we really need a base in Crete that is so costly in rent and yet ensures Greeks security without responsibility or maturity? Surely once we leave, those brave opportunistic souls in the streets of Athens can talk peace with the newly Islamist Turkish government, solve Cyprus on their own, or fend off terrorists from across the Mediterranean.

The point is not to be gratuitously punitive or devolve into isolationism, but to continue to apply to Europe the model that was so successful in the Philippines and now South Korea--ongoing redeployment of Americans to where we can still strike in emergencies, but without empowering hypocritical hosts in time of peace.

We must also sound in international fora as friendly and cooperative as possible with the Russians, Chinese, and the lunatic Latin American populists--even as we firm up our contingency plans and strengthen military ties of convenience with concerned states like Australia, Japan, India, and Brazil.

The United States must control our borders, for reasons that transcend even terrorism and national security. One way to cool the populist hatred emanating from Latin America is to ensure that it becomes a privilege, not a birthright, to enter the United States. In traveling the Middle East, I notice the greatest private complaint is not Israel or even Iraq, but the inability to enter the United States as freely as in the past. And that, oddly, is not necessarily a bad thing, as those who damn us are slowly learning that their cheap hatred has had real consequences.

Then there is, of course, oil. It is the great distorter, one that punishes the hard-working poor states who need fuel to power their reforming economies while rewarding failed regimes for their mischief, by the simple accident that someone else discovered it, developed it, and then must purchase it from under their dictatorial feet. We must drill, conserve, invent, and substitute our way out of this crisis to ensure the integrity of our foreign policy, to stop the subsidy of crazies like Chavez and Ahmadinejad, and to lower the world price of petroleum that taxes those who can least afford it. There is a reason, after all, why the al-Ghamdis are popular icons in Saudi Arabia rather than on the receiving end of a cruise missile.

So we need more firm explanation, less loud assertion, more quiet with our enemies, more lectures to neutrals and friends--and always the very subtle message that cheap anti-Americanism will eventually have consequences.

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Why Not Talk?

Time

By James Carney

5/22

George W. Bush likes his briefings short and concise, so it was somewhat unusual when the President requested some particularly verbose reading material aboard Air Force One last week. Rather than peruse another dry policy paper, Bush was more interested in a rambling 18-page polemic that, among other things, argued that U.S. policies do not comport with Christian values. It came from an unlikely correspondent: Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, whose incendiary statements and nuclear ambitions have raised alarm around the world--and may yet draw the U.S. to the precipice of war.

Nearly three decades had passed since the leaders of Iran and the U.S. communicated directly. Was the missive, punctuated though it was with diatribes against Israel and condemnations of U.S. policy, a signal that Iran wanted to step back from the brink? "All prophets speak of peace and tranquility--based on monotheism, justice and respect for human dignity," Ahmadinejad wrote. "Do you not think that if all of us abide by these principles, we can overcome the world's problems? Will you not accept this invitation?"

How Bush answers may well determine whether the dispute over Iran's nuclear program can be defused before it escalates into a full-blown confrontation. The U.S.

has largely ruled out direct engagement with Tehran, choosing instead to threaten Iran with action by the U.N. Security Council if the regime refuses to abandon its suspect nuclear activities. The Iranians, meanwhile, have repeatedly dismissed the Security Council and insisted on their right to enrich uranium, which can be used for peaceful purposes but is also the first step on the path to the Bomb. The U.S. says Tehran's obstinacy is reason to take punitive steps against Iran. But with the two sides slouching toward a showdown, a growing chorus of foreign-policy mandarins from both parties is pushing Bush to make the Iranians a more dramatic offer: face-to-face negotiations. "I don't understand why we are not exercising all of our diplomatic options with Iran, and that begins with talking," says Senator Chuck Hagel, a Nebraska Republican. "Diplomacy is about talking."

There are some indications that the Iranians may be looking for a face-saving way out. The Ahmadinejad letter was preceded by a separate, more pragmatic overture: an "open letter" submitted to TIME and published on TIME.com from Iran's former top nuclear negotiator, who is now a senior adviser to Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatullah Ali Khamenei. The piece lays out a multistep plan to resolve the nuclear standoff. Officially, the Bush Administration rejected Tehran's purported attempts to start a direct dialogue. "It's not a serious diplomatic overture," Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said. Instead, Washington signed on last week to a European-backed package of proposed incentives and penalties for Iran, aimed at winning the support of Russia and China, which have veto power on the Security Council. But U.S. officials concede that they still haven't persuaded those countries to agree to impose sanctions if Iran fails to comply, leaving the allies with few remaining options for resolving the impasse diplomatically. That's why, in private, some European leaders, including German Chancellor Angela Merkel, are urging Bush to sit down with the Iranians. Without direct talks, says a senior German official, "it's very difficult to imagine a solution to the crisis."

Negotiating with a regime like Iran's, however, would have drawbacks. Skeptics dismiss the sincerity of the Iranian proffers, calling them ploys to distract attention from Tehran's defiance and dilute the international community's will to confront Iran. "We have nothing to say to them," says a U.S. official deeply involved in the Iran issue. "Every demand and every incentive that we would support has already been put on the table." The official adds that by agreeing to talk to Iran, the U.S. would "absolve the international community of the responsibility to tackle this problem." Opponents of engagement further argue that opening direct talks would confer legitimacy on Iran's leaders--who, aside from their suspected desire to obtain nuclear weapons, deny Israel's right to exist, support terrorist groups and lack support among their own people. Says Michael Rubin, an Iran expert at the American Enterprise Institute, a conservative think tank: "The very act of sitting down with them recognizes them."

And yet face-to-face talks with the Islamic republic wouldn't be unprecedented. It's not as if the Americans and Iranians haven't communicated--and in some cases cooperated--in the years since the 1979 revolution and the 444-day American-hostage crisis. Presidents Reagan and Clinton each authorized direct contacts with Tehran, although with decidedly mixed results. Even the Bush Administration was engaged in an extensive dialogue with the Iranians just a few years ago. In the wake of 9/11, a State Department--led negotiating team secured Iran's cooperation--or at least its noninterference--with the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan and overthrow of the Taliban.

That mild thaw ended not long after Bush labeled Iran a member of the "axis of evil," chilling relations with then President Mohammed Khatami, Ahmadinejad's reform-minded predecessor. But as late as May 2003, the two sides discussed swapping members of the Iranian exile group Mujahedin-e Khalq (M.E.K.) whom the U.S. had detained after the invasion of Iraq for al-Qaeda prisoners held by Iran. But the talks ended after the U.S. received intelligence suggesting Iran's complicity in a terrorist bombing in Saudi Arabia. Former officials like Flynt Leverett, who headed Middle East policy at Bush's National Security Council, say the prisoner-swap deal died in part because Administration conservatives, in the heady days after the toppling of Saddam Hussein, envisioned the M.E.K. as a potential vanguard force in an attempt to overthrow the Islamic regime in Tehran.

A former senior Bush aide is worried that the President's ideological aversion to the Iranian regime may prevent him from trying to talk the Iranians out of their nuclear ambitions. Richard Armitage, who served as Deputy Secretary of State during Bush's first term, told TIME, "It appears that the Administration thinks that dialogue equates with weakness, that we've called these regimes 'evil'--either Iran or North Korea--and therefore we won't talk to them. Some people say talking would legitimize the regimes. But we're not trying to change the regimes, and they're already legitimized in the eyes of the international community. So we ought to have enough confidence in our ability as diplomats to go eye to eye with people--even though we disagree in the strongest possible way--and come away without losing anything."

Launching negotiations, though, carries no guarantee of success. Part of the problem begins with finding the right person to talk to. Ahmadinejad is the elected President of Iran, but ultimate power in the theocratic state lies not with him but with Khamenei. Still, Ahmadinejad's nationalist statements have bolstered his popularity with many ordinary Iranians. Ahmadinejad's letter to Bush may have been less an invitation to talk than an attempt to appeal to devout Muslims around the world by mimicking the letters sent by the Prophet Muhammad to leaders during the 7th century, exhorting them to return to God.

In part because of the opacity of the Iranian regime's intentions, only a small minority of the Bush team favors direct talks. Many experts inside and outside the government believe that no matter what incentives the world offers, Iran is determined to become a nuclear power. That has raised the specter that the U.S. might take military action to destroy Iran's nuclear facilities. Although the prospect causes shudders among the U.S.'s European and Arab allies, it might prove more palatable if Washington has shown it has exhausted all diplomatic options, including direct negotiations, before resorting to military force. If the U.S. eventually has to launch a military campaign, says George Perkovich of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, "it's going to need a lot of friends in the aftermath. And if you haven't tried diplomacy in a serious way, nobody's going to stand with you. It's going to be worse than Iraq."

In the end, the one thing that may persuade the Administration to try negotiations is a determination that all the alternatives--including a military confrontation while the U.S. is still tied down in Iraq and Afghanistan--are worse. A U.S. officer says, "We are so taxed right now, we don't have the ground troops to launch an attack." A large swath of Republicans close to Bush say they realize the country does not have the stomach for another war and Bush has lost the reservoir of trust that he had going into Afghanistan and Iraq. A senior Administration official says that for now the U.S. isn't planning a dramatic shift toward conciliation. Says the official: "We just

have to keep doing what we're doing and hope it takes us somewhere." But what if it leads to a place where no one wants to go?

Reading Ahmadinejad in Washington

Weekly Standard

By Hillel Fradkin

5/29

WILL THE UNITED STATES declare war on the Islamic Republic of Iran? For months, this question has been the theme of diplomatic and public discourse--with horror usually expressed at the idea. But it now seems that we have this backwards. For the import of the letter that Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, president of Iran, sent to President Bush in the first week of May is that Ahmadinejad and Iran have declared war on the United States. Many reasons are given, but the most fundamental is that the United States is a liberal democracy, the most powerful in the world and the leader of all the others. Liberal democracy, the letter says, is an affront to God, and as such its days are numbered. It would be best if President Bush and others realized this and abandoned it. But at all events, Iran will help where possible to hasten its end.

Neither the Bush administration nor its many critics appear to appreciate the significance, ideological and practical, of the letter. Nor do they appear to appreciate the remarkable boldness of Ahmadinejad personally. For the formal characteristics of the letter as well as its substance have ancient and modern analogs--letters of Muhammad to the Byzantine, Persian, and Ethiopian emperors of his day warning them to accept Islam and his rule or suffer the consequences, and a letter from Khomeini to Mikhail Gorbachev along similar lines. Thus, Ahmadinejad presents himself as the true heir of Muhammad and Khomeini and may even be suggesting that he is a founder himself. At the least, he presents himself as the spokesman and leader of Islam and the Muslim world in its entirety, transcending the Shiite/Sunni divide. Both this boldness and this claim are consistent with the whole series of pronouncements and actions Ahmadinejad has taken in the brief period since he was elected last summer. But the letter, in its form and substance, raises this to a new and much higher level of clarity and power as well as menace.

The Bush administration and its critics have ignored all this. They have chosen to view the letter within a narrower prism--the question of negotiations or rather non-negotiations over Iran's enrichment of uranium. For the administration, the letter contained "nothing new" in this regard. For Bush's critics, it was an "opening," one that could best be exploited if the United States were to drop its resistance to direct participation in negotiations with Tehran.

This reaction is not entirely surprising. Ahmadinejad's letter does have a bearing on the struggle over Iran's pursuit of enriched uranium. Its long catalog of alleged U.S. crimes against Muslim interests and states specifically, and against Africa, Latin America, and the poorer parts of the world more generally, mimics the standard litany of anti-American complaints. It is intended to further undermine support for the United States and weaken its position in the confrontation over Iran's nuclear program. In this it may have some success. But for these purposes, it need not have presented its critique in a religious and ideological mode, up to and including the charge that Bush is a hypocrite in his claim to be "a follower of Jesus Christ." That is,

Ahmadinejad could have done without the theological "meanderings" about which both the administration and its critics complained. Indeed, for these purposes it would have been better if he had. Bush's critics--including most recently Russia's Vladimir Putin--like to charge him with hypocrisy, but they are by and large not concerned with Christian standards. And above all, the attack on liberal democracy could not be assumed to appeal to secular critics.

Yet Ahmadinejad did decide to approach the world, Muslim and non-Muslim, theologically--to insist that nuclear proliferation is not only an issue of policy but also of theology, indeed of the most fundamental and important issues of theology. He defends the right not only of Iran to nuclear technology but also of all Muslim countries as Muslim. Indeed they have not only a right but a duty to pursue such technology. The issue must be understood in the light of the most fundamental and important conflict in the world today as Ahmadinejad sees it--a fundamental conflict between Islam and its rivals, most immediately liberal democracy as embodied in the United States, but also Christianity.

All of this can be seen partially but still somewhat dimly in Ahmadinejad's emphasis on Christian hypocrisy, which may in this context mean two things: violations by self-professed Christians of the standards and teachings of historic Christianity, or the violation by historic Christianity of the true teachings of the Prophet Jesus. The latter is a traditional Islamic view of the defect and even crime of historic Christians. In calling upon Bush, as Ahmadinejad does emphatically, to embrace the "teachings of the prophets," he is calling upon him not only to abandon liberal democracy but Christianity as well--to embrace Islam, to which all the world must ultimately submit, and which is gathering momentum in our time.

THIS IS THE WAY THE LETTER will be understood and received by many Muslims, both inside and outside Iran. Far from being simply meandering, the letter manages to interweave appeals to two different audiences, the non-Muslim and largely secular world and the Muslim world. Its objective--to prosecute the war on behalf of Islam--unites the two. To that end, it aims to divide and weaken Islam's adversary--the non-Muslim world--and to rally the Muslim world behind Ahmadinejad. In both respects it seems so far to be succeeding. Ahmadinejad followed the publication of the letter with a visit to Indonesia, the largest and most moderate of all Muslim countries and also very far removed from Iran's usual sphere of concerns. Iran invested heavily in ensuring that he received a warm and even triumphal reception there. Ahmadinejad seems to have received praise from Indonesian officials and the leaders of other Muslim countries in the region, as well as from clerical figures, including the head of Indonesia's Islamic State University, generally regarded as a leader of moderate Islam. Ahmadinejad has not only declared war but has taken an interim victory lap.

But, it may be asked, So what? So what if Ahmadinejad has declared that Islam is in fundamental, even mortal, conflict with the rest of the world? Formally that has always been the position of the Iranian Revolution. So what if he declares that Iran and the Muslim world are now on the march and have seized the initiative? The power of Iran may be measured in concrete ways and is, for now, limited and may remain so if we can only reach agreement on halting uranium enrichment. Are Ahmadinejad and Iran not further limited by his disability that he is a Shiite in a Muslim world that is overwhelmingly Sunni? And so what if Ahmadinejad implicitly lays claim to the mantle of Khomeini? Will he not ultimately be constrained by the very regime Khomeini established and built, in which he is presently subordinate to

others--the regnant ayatollahs, including Khamenei the Supreme Guide--with a greater claim on authority? Will not the latter constrain him, if only out of self-interest and their own ambition to rule?

So what, in short, if Ahmadinejad wants to see the world in theological terms and to believe Islam is on the march and he is at its head? So what if he sees fit to burden us with these theological musings? The world, when all is said and done, is something else, and his views are out of touch with its reality and even, may it be said, delusional.

These objections would be more persuasive if we could forget that we have within living memory experience of revolutionary leaders--for that is what Ahmadinejad emphatically is--who faced apparently great odds in coming to personal power and great odds in taking on the powers of the world and nevertheless achieved both. Such people come up with practical if brutal solutions to their apparent disabilities. For us, who are ever so prudent and cautious, it would be safer to entertain the possibility that Ahmadinejad is a man who may also find solutions to the obstacles in his way, a man who finds great opportunities to be exploited and has the cunning and the will to do so.

Indeed, there is substantial evidence that he has already begun. Although subordinate to higher authority in the Iranian regime, he came to office in that regime at a time when its morale was low. He has managed to revive its spirit, especially among the cadres, like the militia, on whom it depends. It is a serious question whether his superiors--who ever since the rise of the reform movement in 1997 have been preoccupied by fear of collapse--do not need him as much as he needs them.

It is true that Ahmadinejad presently occupies a subordinate office, a deficiency reinforced by the fact that he is not a jurist, let alone an ayatollah, and thus lacks the credentials for supreme rule as defined by the principle of the regime--"the rule of the jurisprudent."

But he may be in the process of addressing that difficulty by enlisting a source of authority--the Hidden Imam--consistent with and even superior to that principle. Ahmadinejad has presented himself as the herald or "prophet" of the Hidden Imam--the ultimate, if absent, ruler and authority for so-called Twelver Shiism--and has gone so far as to claim that he had a vision of the Imam, at the U.N. of all places.

It remains to be seen what further use Ahmadinejad may make of this status and the kind of authority it may convey and with what success. It would amount to a further radicalization of Khomeini's original radical break with the tradition of Twelver Shiism, which opposed and still opposes the political engagement of clerics. Formally it is constrained by the regime Khomeini founded, but emotionally it is a plausible extension. At least one ayatollah is reported to have declared in recent days that Ahmadinejad's letter was the "hand of God."

AT ALL EVENTS, there is little evidence that his ostensible superiors are inclined to restrain him. Ayatollah Khamenei gave a talk prior to the letter that endorsed Ahmadinejad's policies without reservation. Moreover, Ahmadinejad's supporters in the Basij militia and other "revolutionary" institutions have announced and begun to implement a purge of "opponents of the revolution" in key places, including the universities. In the presently unforeseeable event that his superiors tried to force a

showdown, it is not clear who would have more "troops."

Outside Iran, Ahmadinejad encounters a world of opportunities. The non-Muslim countries are very much divided over Iran's ambitions, acting either hesitantly or at cross purposes. Even his main adversary, the United States, seems divided and uncertain.

The Muslim world, for its part, is rich with the opportunities created by great longing, great resentment, and great anger. Those longings (for a more glorious role for Islam) and those resentments (over the fallen estate of Islam) have been brewing for a long time. For those in the Muslim world moved by these sentiments, the attacks of September 11, 2001, offered the satisfaction of a victory and produced admiration for Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda.

But Osama also promised further victories, that this was the beginning, not the end, of the new Islamic jihad. And in this he has not been successful, presumably because of the vigor of American and allied attacks on al Qaeda in Afghanistan and elsewhere. Even in Iraq, where al Qaeda under the direction of Abu Musab al Zarqawi keeps up the battle, it has not yet achieved its aim of driving American forces out and may not. Moreover, its engagement in Iraq has had liabilities for al Qaeda, which were the substance of al-Zawahiri's letter of last summer. Al Qaeda as such may be in decline.

In these circumstances, Ahmadinejad has attempted to step into bin Laden's place as the leader of the radical Islamic movement, as the man with the will and capacity to challenge and threaten the United States. Ahmadinejad has already enjoyed some success in parts of the Muslim world. This has been accompanied by the resurgence of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and especially Palestine, where Hamas won control of the Palestinian Authority. This has permitted him to assert, as he does in his letter, that the forces of radical Islam--or, as he would have it, simply Islam--are on a roll. Ahmadinejad has bent every effort to support and join forces with Hamas and may well succeed. And, as always, he has Hezbollah in Lebanon at his disposal.

From all these developments, the radical movement has gained renewed confidence in the claim, first put forward by Osama bin Laden, that its adversaries, principally the United States, do not have the stomach for a long fight, or even a short one. Islam's enemies can and will be pushed back and defeated by radical forces, because the latter, unlike their enemies, do not fear death and even welcome it. They can even, as Ahmadinejad recently said, accept the possibility of nuclear war as a necessity of the struggle. Altogether the spirits of the radical Islamic movement are high, and Ahmadinejad is the most powerful voice of that spirit.

This renewed ideological vigor and confidence present us with a host of difficulties in addition to the more material problem of the prospective Iranian bomb. It remains to be seen what we can and will do to keep the mullahs from obtaining nuclear bombs. Were we to be successful by diplomacy--unlikely--or by military action--ruled out of bounds by many--it would certainly affect the ideological struggle, as well as be a great good in itself. It would do so because it would be a defeat, and a significant one, for radical Islam. But given the temper of the man and the needs of the Iranian regime, it would not end ideological and other kinds of warfare.

For the moment all this is unknown. But what is known, or what should be known and deeply grasped, is that everything Ahmadinejad--and for that matter the radical

movement as a whole--does is guided by an ideological vision and commitment. It needs to be addressed as such. For the moment and not only for the moment, this requires that liberal democrats declare that they have no intention of abandoning their way of life and see no need to do so, since they are fully prepared to defend it and because that way of life provides the resources--political, economic, and military--to defend itself.

It is necessary to inform Ahmadinejad and his radical allies that they are in for a real fight. This may not suffice to lead them to question their fundamental assumption and inspiration that we are on the run. But it may give pause to the many Muslims and non-Muslims standing on the sidelines, who see radical success and do not see American or Western resolve.

Of course the best person to make the first such declaration is President Bush--not as a Christian but as the world's leading liberal democrat. And not to Ahmadinejad, for whom a direct reply would be a victory, but to the Iranian people, the Muslim world, and the non-Muslim world.

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Move On

National Review

By Daniel Freedman

5/31

It's a shame that a hopeless shrug was all that President Bush gave Prime Minister Olmert during his recent visit to Washington. It could have been so different. Prime Minister Sharon's successor came to the capital with his "convergence plan"--unilaterally withdrawing from parts of the Jewish State because, he explains, with the terrorist group Hamas in power, Israel has no peace partner. The Bush administration, meantime, recognizes that Israel has no peace partner, but at the same time the president is also committed to the Middle East quartet's "Road Map" and officially can't endorse any unilateral move that is likely to "pre-judge" a final settlement--hence the hopeless shrug.

Some see the shrug as good news--it means the Bush administration won't block Olmert's plan. But the real shame is that President Bush once again passed up on an action that would not only move the peace process forward, but would also reduce the likelihood of a future Hamas reelection. And, to top it all off, all President Bush has to do is comply with American law. That action is moving the American embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem--as required by the 1995 Jerusalem Embassy Act. Passed by the Senate 93 to 5, and the House 347 to 37, the act made it "the official policy of the United States" that Jerusalem be recognized as Israel's capital and accordingly America's embassy be moved there. The act mandated withholding funds from the State Department if the embassy was not moved. But the act also gave the president a six-month waiver over the withholding of funds if he deemed it necessary for national security. President Clinton repeatedly used the six-month waiver, as has President Bush. So while it remains American law that the embassy should be moved, because of the use of the presidential waiver the State department hasn't had funds withheld.

The excuses given for the use of the waiver, courtesy of the Arabists at the State department, are that moving the embassy will destabilize peace negotiations and anger the other Arab states. Today those excuses are weaker than ever. It's hard to imagine how negotiations could be destabilized further. There are none. The Palestinian Arabs are now represented by terrorists committed to Israel's destruction. What's the worst that could happen if the embassy is moved? Hamas will reiterate for the hundred and first time that they want to wipe out the Jewish state? And what will those Arab states--the likes of Saudi Arabia and Syria--do? Will they still refuse to recognize Israel? More importantly why should other states, and undemocratic states at that, determine where America places its embassy in one of its closest allies? Israel is the only country in the world where the American president blocks the placing of America's embassy in the nation's capital.

Moreover, not moving the embassy is actually a barrier to peace. Not moving the embassy leaves the Palestinian Arabs with the hope that one day, as Hamas promises, Jerusalem will be theirs. But this is a false hope. The status of Jerusalem is non-negotiable to the Jewish people. King David's oath, "If I forget thee, O'Jerusalem, let my right hand turn lame," recited by Jews to this day, was made 700 years before the advent of Christianity and 1,200 years before Islam. But not only was Jerusalem the center of the ancient Jewish state, it's also the center of the modern state: The parliament, the Supreme Court, and the central bank are all there. Leaving the Palestinian Arabs with any hope that one day they'll be given Jerusalem is leaving them with a false dream. But by not moving the embassy, the American government is signaling that the dream isn't so false. If the Jews are denied sovereignty over their capital city, even by their closest ally, it's sending the message that everything is still to play for. And so while Hamas's agenda seems extreme to most, the Palestinian Arab people see America legitimizing part of Hamas's agenda--one reason for their electoral success.

Leaving the Palestinian Arabs with false hope is why previous peace plans failed. Oslo and other grand plans were based on the premise that the big divisive issues-- Jerusalem, refugees, final borders--could be dealt with at the end. The architects thought leaving aside the big issues till the end would create enough good will in between to deal with them at the end. But what happened was that the Palestinian Arabs were left with the false hope that they'd get all their demands--and every day this false hope only gets stronger--and so the peace process collapsed.

President Bush is doing a disservice to both the Jewish people and the Palestinian Arabs by blocking the embassy move. It's an insult to the Jewish people by refusing to recognize the capital of the Jewish state and implies that her legitimacy is an open question. And it's harmful to the Palestinian Arabs because it leaves them with a false hope and helps Hamas's election chances. It's a disservice to both because it makes peace all that less realistic. Supporters of the Jewish state thought President Bush understood this when he promised on May 22, 2000, that "... as soon as I take office, I will begin the process of moving the United States ambassador to the city Israel has chosen as its capital." The president has broken that promise every six months since taking office, and, unsurprisingly, peace looks more distant than ever. It's time for a new policy, or rather implementing an old policy and keeping an old promise.

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Damage Is Done

National Review

By Michael Rubin

6/1

It did not take long for Iranian President Mahmud Ahmadinejad to slap down Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's offer of direct talks. "Rice's comments can be considered a propaganda move," Ahmadinejad told the Islamic Republic News Agency.

Rice's announcement that U.S. officials were prepared to both offer the Iranian regime new incentives and sit down with it was a strategic fumble. Not only did Rice provide Ahmadinejad with an opportunity to humiliate the "arrogant power" to his domestic audience, but she also undercut what little international credibility the U.S. retains.

On its surface, the U.S. initiative was traditional diplomacy. Rice offered both carrots and sticks: "We are agreed with our European partners on the essential elements of a package containing both the benefits if Iran makes the right choice, and the costs if it does not." But the devil is in the details. The stick--if Iran remains noncompliant--is a vague European and Russian commitment to consider sanctions at the United Nations. What specific sanctions? Not decided. What time frame? Undetermined.

Should Washington trust European and Russian sincerity when it comes to a fundamental threat to U.S. national security? In Bush's calculation, the worst outcome would be for the Islamic Republic of Iran to possess nuclear bombs. For many Europeans, though, the idea that the U.S. might act forcefully to deny Iran nuclear weapons is a greater threat. And so they encourage an administration more eager to please the international audience than lead it to once again entangle itself in multilateral obfuscation.

It is tempting to believe engagement can succeed, but precedent suggests otherwise. In early 1992, Berlin inaugurated a policy of critical engagement with Iran, believing that dialogue and concession could draw the Islamic Republic into the norms of international behavior. Soon after, on September 17, 1992, Iranian government assassins murdered four Iranian dissidents. On April 10, 1997, a German court found that a committee composed of Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, Iranian President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, and intelligence minister Ali Fallahian had ordered the hit. Rather than moderate, European concessions convinced Iranian leaders that they could get away with murder. They did.

After delivering to their Iranian counterparts a strongly worded tongue-lashing, European officials tried again. Between 2000 and 2005, European Union trade with Iran almost tripled. Oil prices surged. But rather than invest its windfall in civil society and basic infrastructure, the Iranian government--at the time in the hands of so-called reformists--poured its hard currency into a clandestine nuclear program. On September 24, 2005, the International Atomic Energy Agency found Iran in non-compliance with the nuclear non-proliferation treaty's safeguards agreement.

European negotiators tried once more. On November 15, 2004, the Iranian

government agreed to suspend uranium enrichment--the same demand Rice made yesterday. Iran got what it wanted: A decision not to refer the matter to the United Nations. The next day, the Daily Telegraph reported, that Foreign Secretary Jack Straw said "he was confident that Tehran was taking its commitment seriously." European backslapping was short-lived. Iran decided to backslide on its commitment and again began to enrich uranium. It was typical Tehran behavior. Iranian diplomacy consists of one step forward, two steps back. Western officials meet backsliding--however large--with a click of the tongue; they mark forward progress, however slight, with concessions. That the net vector is backwards matters not when diplomats just seek to win the next promise or transitory deal.

European governments are not the only ones who have experienced Iranian insincerity. Washington has too. Prior to the Iraq campaign, the Iranian government pledged to not interfere. They broke their promise within days of the fall of Saddam Hussein. Today, Iranian intelligence have free reign over southern Iraq and, increasingly, Iraqi Kurdistan. None of this should come as a surprise to Washington. Iranian government officials consider U.S. red lines to be drawn with pencil on sand.

Foggy Bottom's fundamental misunderstanding of Iran is dangerous. There was little surprise to Rice's about-face. Undersecretary of State for Policy Nicholas Burns has long urged direct negotiation; he can be persuasive. There is a mantra in Foggy Bottom--inculcated in diplomats from their very first day in the A-100 class--that any problem can be solved with discussion and negotiation. In some cases this is true. But it also reflects a projection on the part of U.S. diplomats who feel that all problems are political and solutions lie only in discovery of some magic formula of incentives and compromises. But multiculturalism is not just about celebrating diversity. It is also about recognizing that those from other nations and cultures can have different ideologies, values, and thought processes. "Diplomacy is much more than just talking to your friends. You've got to talk to people who aren't our friends, and even people you dislike," former Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage told the New York Times. Perhaps. But does Khamenei view diplomacy the same way? Where did Iranians learn the art of negotiation? In some swank Virginia institute or in the bazaar? How did a lifelong seminary education shape Khamenei's perception of the West?

If Rice's offer was just a misstep--to be forgotten like Madeleine Albright's--then no harm done. But Rice set a precedent. Her offer may have sought to solve one problem, but it signaled other nations that the path to concession and recognition lies through proliferation, not compliance. Washington's handicap has always been the triumph of short-term fixes over long-term strategy. Why should any country voluntarily forfeit a nuclear program as South Africa and Brazil once did, or nuclear weapons as did the Ukraine and Kazakhstan?

The damage caused by Rice's offer to the people of Iran may be irreversible. She can speak of how "President Bush wants a new and positive relationship between the American people and the people of Iran." But if so, why recognize and legitimize the unelected regime which is oppressing them? In 1953 and 1979, the U.S. government supported an unpopular leader against the will of the Iranian public. Why, in 2006, should we make the same mistake a third time?

During his second inauguration, Bush declared, "All who live in tyranny and hopelessness can know: The United States will not ignore your oppression, or excuse your oppressors. When you stand for your liberty, we will stand with you." Nothing

could be further from the truth. The wholesale abandonment of those seeking liberty goes beyond Iran. When Rice announced the reestablishment of diplomatic relations with Libya, she did not mention democracy. Likewise, Rice has broken her promises to the Egyptian people. On May 25, Egyptian police beat and sodomized a 24-year-old protester Muhammad Sharkawi. His crime? Holding a sign reading, "I want my rights back." The Egyptian government has denied him medical attention, and those monitoring his case in Cairo say his breathing is labored due to cracked ribs, and he is urinating blood due to other internal injuries. Both the State Department and the U.S. embassy in Cairo remain silent.

On September 20, 2001, President Bush declared, "Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists." With Bush's decision to abandon freedom-seekers across the region, and reward a terror-sponsoring Iranian regime in noncompliance with its international commitments, the White House has signaled to the world, stand with us if you want, but we only respond when you're against us.

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HARVARD PAPER

Academic Anti-Semitism

National Review
By Phyllis Chesler
5/30

This weekend, as expected, and despite an international petition drive launched by Scholars for Peace in the Middle East, Britain's National Association of Teachers in Higher and Further Education (NATHFE) voted to boycott Israeli academics. Theirs is a kinder, gentler boycott, because it exempts those Israeli academics who, McCarthy style, are willing to publicly disavow their government's (nonexistent) "apartheid" policies. This is the third time since 2002 that British academics have gone on record to censure and isolate Israeli academics.

The British have a marred history in their relations with the Jews. They murdered and expelled them from their island in the 13th century, and they refused to allow ships filled with Jews in flight from Hitler to land in British "Palestine" in the 20th century.

Although Britain once colonized the entire Arab world, British poets and adventurers romanticized Arab men as nobly and sexily savage. British diplomats and businessmen overlooked Arab barbarism for the sake of oil. Politically correct British intellectuals romanticized Arabs in another way, as the "victims" of European colonialism--for which they blamed, you guessed it, the Jews and the Jewish state. Sometimes, such Stalinized and Palestinianized British thinkers managed to note that Arabs were ruled by cruel despots who impoverished and terrorized their own people--but they blamed it on the American CIA.

In 2000, the Arab League, Iran, and the Palestinians unleashed a savage and lethal intifada against Israeli civilians, 80 percent of whom are Jews whose parents and

grand-parents survived pogroms, the Holocaust, mass expulsion from Arab lands and at least five or six wars of self-defense in Israel. From the fall of 2000 until the late spring of 2003, Israelis experienced something akin to 9/11 almost every month, sometimes every other week. This is why they built the security fence, called by some the "apartheid wall." Allegedly civilized "chatterers" characterized Israelis under siege as "worse than Nazis" whose "genocidal policies" justified the rash of Palestinian serial suicide killings. Such academics did not condemn the exterminationist Islamist propaganda which turned countless adolescents into brainwashed, brutal killers.

British academics responded to the military, terrorist, and propaganda war against the Jews by launching divestment and boycott campaigns against Israel in general and against Israeli academics in particular. Thus, in 2002, 123 British academics published an Open Letter in the London Guardian calling for a "moratorium" on all cultural and research links with Israel. In 2004-2005, the British Association of University Teachers (AUT)--which has never moved to boycott academics from countries such as China, Iran, or Sudan--voted to boycott two Israeli universities for their alleged complicity in their government's military policies. After a tremendous struggle, that vote was overturned.

Similar divestment and boycott campaigns against Israel--and only against Israel--were launched elsewhere. Ford Foundation-funded organizations took part in conferences that demonized Israel and America from the Palestinian point of view. In 2005, the Association of American University Professors (AAUP) found that "the Zionist lobby" exerted a "pernicious" influence against Arabs and Muslims on American campuses. Early in 2006, two professors, Harvard's Stephen Walt and the University of Chicago's Charles Mearsheimer heartily agreed. Their shoddy position paper was comprehensively and effectively critiqued, which, in the view of their supporters, proved that the "Zionist lobby" really does rule the world.

The American Association for the Advancement of Science, a group founded in 1848 which publishes Science magazine, condemned the NATHFE boycott as did British and Scottish church groups. A group of British scholars, through an organization called Engage, gathered 600 British academic signatures against the boycott. Scholars for Peace in the Middle East, together with the Israeli-based International Advisory Board for Academic Freedom, gathered more than 5,000 signatures from academics on every continent who teach at more than 250 universities. Some knights of the British realm, and many who teach at Cambridge, Oxford, and at 28 other British universities, also signed. Interestingly, many signers are professors of physics, medicine, math, and computer science, who, unlike professors of social science and the humanities, are not politicized. They take their disciplines seriously and obviously respect the work of Israeli scientists who often lead the field.

A "silent" boycott has already begun in which some British academics have refused to write for Israeli journals and refused to publish or review the work of Israeli academics and creative artists in British journals. In my view, those who do so have effectively cut themselves off from the international community of scholars. According to the president of SPME, Ed Beck, "this boycott offends tolerant and fair-minded people from across the political spectrum."

The NATHFE boycott motion passed by a vote of 106 to 71 with 21 abstentions. This is a very small number, and it may be that they speak for a minority of obsessively like-minded academics. In addition, next week, NATHFE will dissolve and merge with

another British union (AUT). At that point, this boycott may no longer legally "count."

It counts as a propaganda victory for intolerance nonetheless. And it appeases Islamism and bring Europe one step closer to becoming Eurabia--which endangers both America and Israel.

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Unrealists

The National Interest

By Dimitri K. Simes

6/5

HAVING AN honest and serious foreign policy debate is not an easy thing in contemporary American political culture. Television sound bites, bumper-sticker cliches passing for ideas, single-issue interest groups and highly partisan politics all work against a thoughtful evaluation of realistic U.S. options. Yet even for the sole superpower, acting in a state of delusion is not a prescription for a successful foreign policy.

Take Iraq. It should be apparent by now that the United States went into Iraq without a serious foreign policy debate. There was little critical examination of intelligence justifying the war, what the war was supposed to accomplish, or what postwar planning would be required. How did this happen?

Beginning in the late 1990s, a highly vocal group of neoconservatives--many involved in the Project for a New American Century--started a crusade for regime change in Iraq. In letters, articles and speeches, they argued that there was no other way to deal with Iraq than by wholesale regime change--and they did not hesitate to attack those who disagreed with their assessment as unpatriotic or cowardly. Removing Saddam Hussein was deemed to be such a priority that, almost immediately after 9/11, then-Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz was arguing that the United States should attack Iraq before dealing with Al-Qaeda's sanctuary in Afghanistan.

Champions of regime change in Iraq were certainly not limited to Jewish Americans or, even more generally, to supporters of Israel. But it is also clear that many of those who were vociferous proponents of the Iraq invasion were also those who enthusiastically endorsed and even encouraged policy proposals advanced by the segment of the Israeli political spectrum in Benjamin Netanyahu's corner of the Likud Party--essentially requiring the United States to promote permanent revolution in the Middle East as the only way to ensure Israel's security and survival. Those who disagreed with this agenda were accused of being soft on terror and, in more recent years, of being "enemies of democracy", unsympathetic to Israel, or worse.

The important yet troubling discussion of the Israeli lobby this spring is a dramatic illustration of our difficulty in having an honest conversation about U.S. foreign policy among ourselves. The "scandal" started when two professors--John Mearsheimer of

the University of Chicago (who is also a valued member of The National Interest's Advisory Council) and Stephen Walt of Harvard University--published a "working paper" that concluded that U.S. foreign policy has been twisted by the "Israel Lobby" to such a degree that it no longer reflects fundamental American interests and values.

I disagree with many points in the paper, beginning with its first footnote, which asserts that the very existence of an Israel lobby suggests that a pro-Israel policy "is not in the American national interest." Policy in the modern American system is not determined by a council of the learned and the disinterested. Fundamental to our democracy is the notion that those with an interest in shaping decisions should organize, advise and advocate--and anyone who wants a role needs a lobby.

Also, although they acknowledge that what they call "the Lobby" is in fact a "loose coalition of individuals and organizations", Mearsheimer and Walt never made sufficient distinctions among the many groups and individuals who support Israel to varying degrees for varying reasons. Being committed to Israel's secure existence does not necessarily make someone a member of "the Lobby", and grouping together organizations and individuals with very different philosophies and agendas only confuses both who Israel's supporters are and how they exercise influence in Washington. Some groups, like the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, are clearly lobbyists and would not deny it. Others have strong affection for Israel but act entirely on their own without any direction from anyone inside or outside the United States. And there are people like me, who disagree with specific Israeli policies on many occasions, particularly on the settlements, but are not prepared to dictate to Israel how to protect itself while it is subject to regular terrorist attacks and menacing threats from Iran. (And here I must note that Mearsheimer and Walt might have had greater credibility if they had acknowledged that Israel never had a credible Palestinian partner willing and able to assure the security of the Jewish state in exchange for territorial concessions.)

One can also fault Mearsheimer and Walt for a lack of nuance or sensitivity. They do not express any special sympathy for the Jewish predicament in the Middle East or in Europe, the Holocaust notwithstanding. On a personal level, as someone who experienced anti-Semitism firsthand in the Soviet Union, I would have welcomed a little more understanding on their part--but there is a great difference between not being particularly sympathetic to a person or group and expressing bigotry or hatred, such as anti-Semitism. Nothing in Mearsheimer and Walt's paper merits the latter accusation.

Still, Mearsheimer and Walt are serious people raising serious issues in a serious way. They--and by extension all Americans who want a rational discussion about U.S. foreign policy--deserve better than the virtual lynching to which they were subjected by some influential pundits. A former Israeli official commented that it is "certainly time for a debate. Sadly, if predictably, response to the Harvard study has been characterized by a combination of the shrill and the smug"--including charges of bigotry, hatred and anti-Semitism.¹

SO WHAT made Mearsheimer and Walt's critics so mad? Their lack of nuance and subtlety hardly explains the fury--and their main points can be easily substantiated. There is a powerful pro-Israel lobby in the United States, which together with its allies has a major impact on U.S. policy toward Israel and the Middle East in general. Critics of Mearsheimer and Walt, who are having a good time ridiculing their suggestion that the very presence of the Israel lobby demonstrates that supporting

Israel is not in the national interest, should also admit that lobbies are created to influence policy and Israel's lobby is no different. Likewise, it is hardly controversial that the Israel lobby is probably the most influential ethnic lobby in America. As Nicholas Goldberg wrote in the Los Angeles Times: "It seems silly to deny that a powerful lobby on behalf of Israel exists. The real question is how pernicious it is. Does it, in fact, persuade us to act counter to our national interest--or is it a positive thing?"² This is what reasonable people should debate.

Since the interests of no two states completely coincide, it is a legitimate question to ask what the costs and benefits are of supporting another state that finds itself in a difficult fight against many opponents and what might be the price of making its enemies our enemies. Israel's opponents control enormous oil reserves and have used them in the past to penalize U.S. support of Israel, as during the 1973 oil embargo. Today, widespread hostility toward Israel in the Middle East and among Muslims in general contributes to hostility toward the United States, including, but not limited to, terrorism. Simply raising these points should not be grounds for vitriolic attack. And ignoring facts because they are inconvenient is irresponsible and offensive.

But this is exactly what Martin Peretz, the editor-in-chief of the New Republic, did. He attacked Maryland University professor and Brookings scholar Shibley Telhami for being a "simpleminded person" for his observations, cited by Mearsheimer and Walt, that "no other issue resonates with the public in the Arab world, and many other parts of the Muslim world, more deeply than Palestine. No other issue shapes the regional perceptions of America more fundamentally than the issue of Palestine."³ A "pathetic citation", Peretz says, even though Telhami has drawn this conclusion from extensive and vigorous polling in the Arab and Islamic world--and his assessments are substantiated by U.S. government studies.

But pointing out that U.S. support for Israel complicates America's standing in the Arab and Muslim world does not mean that one believes that abandoning Israel would be a net positive for the United States. Abandoning a long-standing ally costs credibility--and credibility is one of a great power's most important assets. Any perception that American support for Israel could be jettisoned--particularly as a result of hostile pressure--would embolden the Jewish state's enemies and other extremists, destabilizing the whole region. Moderate, pro-American Arab regimes would be their next victims. Finally, U.S. moral commitments to Israel (as the land of the long-suffering Jewish people and a fellow democracy) are not to be discounted.

But critics of Mearsheimer and Walt are offended by the very idea that American support of Israel could ever be to America's disadvantage--just as they were offended by those who questioned the magnitude of the threat posed by Saddam Hussein or who pointed out that constant calls for regime change (as embodied in the 1998 bipartisan Congressional resolution) and ongoing military strikes might create a self-fulfilling prophecy. Their response was to attack the credibility and character and even the patriotism of those who think otherwise. Even Brent Scowcroft, who as national security advisor in the George H. W. Bush Administration played a key role in defeating Saddam during the Gulf War, was the victim of a vicious and highly personal assault. Predictably, the bulk of the character assassination directed at Mearsheimer and Walt has come from individuals who bear the lion's share of responsibility for our predicament in Iraq, yet who want to use name-calling as a way of precluding any honest examination of how it happened.

One of the most shameless responses to Mearsheimer and Walt came from Johns Hopkins professor Eliot Cohen, who--without providing any evidence--accused them of being anti-Semites. He was offended that Mearsheimer and Walt mentioned him in passing--in one of their footnotes--as part of the neoconservative network eager to use U.S. power to reshape the Middle East. How dare they even imply (which they did not) that his loyalty might be questioned when the American flag flew from his porch and his oldest son--the third generation of his family to serve as an officer in the U.S. Army--was about to return from duty in Baghdad?⁴

Of course, Cohen's fellow neoconservatives have never had any shame in painting their opponents as would-be traitors. (Remember the "unpatriotic conservatives"?)⁵ They are now shocked to receive a tiny dose of their own medicine. But this is not about name-calling; it is about accountability for the policy positions one has articulated. Cohen had a long record of public advocacy in favor of regime change in Iraq, years before 9/11. He also called for the overthrow of the Iranian government in 2001, when the moderate and pro-reform, if ineffective, President Khatami was in charge rather than the current firebrand Ahmadinejad. And Cohen was not just an outside advocate; as a member of the Defense Policy Board, he directly contributed to deliberations that led to the current American debacle in Iraq. His book *Supreme Command* (2002) publicly celebrated Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's tendency to disregard the advice and assessments of the professional military in planning for the Iraq campaign and its aftermath--and we know the results.⁶

All of us can make mistakes, particularly policy analysts. I myself did not think that Mikhail Gorbachev would be both bold and blind enough to undertake reforms that would destroy his own system. Afterward, I thought and even wrote about the reasons for my--and others'--errors in judgment about Gorbachev and hopefully learned some useful lessons. What is particularly repugnant about polemicists like Cohen is that instead of taking a decent interval to analyze their mistakes, they move at full speed to wrap themselves in the American flag to attack others.

Lawrence Kaplan, in attacking realists and other pragmatic conservatives in 2000, opined: "Were foreign policy intellectuals held to the same standards of accountability as doctors and lawyers, a substantial slice of the commentariat would have been sued for malpractice or disbarred"--commenting on the "declinists" at the time of the Soviet collapse. But many neoconservatives don't want that standard applied to them. This is precisely what Mearsheimer has been doing for the last two years. In these pages last fall, he wrote:

"Neoconservatives and realists have two very different theories of international politics, which were reflected in their opposing views on the wisdom of invading and occupying Iraq. Actually, the war itself has been a strong test of the two theories. We have been able to see which side's predictions were correct. It seems clear that Iraq has turned into a debacle for the United States, which is powerful evidence--at least for me--that the realists were right and the neoconservatives were wrong."

Is this, perhaps, the real source of the vehement response to the Mearsheimer and Walt paper?

Quite a few realists, starting with Henry Kissinger (and including me), reluctantly supported the war in Iraq. We believed the assurances presented about his alleged possession of weapons of mass destruction and were concerned that in combination with Saddam's reckless behavior and the U.S. commitment to regime change, they made a policy of containment unsustainable, especially after September 11. But no

realist was in favor of the almost unlimited goal of transforming Iraq and the Middle East, especially with the limited resources envisaged at the time.

Let me make one final observation: Israel is an important friend and ally of the United States, but that does not mean that there is anything inappropriate about discussing openly and seriously not only the advantages, but also the challenges, with which this relationship presents the United States. Israelis do it all the time. Unless one thinks that Israel's case for American support is weak, or that most Americans are secret anti-Semites who are just looking for an excuse to abandon the Jewish state, talking honestly about the U.S. relationship with Israel should be unobjectionable. We may, and sometimes clearly should, decide to stand by Israel no matter what--like we did with our NATO allies. As a democracy, however, we should be allowed to make this and other foreign policy decisions with open eyes and on the basis of a free debate. Unfortunately, some of the loudest advocates of spreading American liberty to the far corners of the world seem distinctly intolerant of freedom at home.

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The Storm over the Israel Lobby

New York Review of Books

By Michael Massing

6/8

Not since Foreign Affairs magazine published Samuel Huntington's "The Clash of Civilizations?" in 1993 has an academic essay detonated with such force as "The Israel Lobby and US Foreign Policy," by professors John J. Mearsheimer of the University of Chicago and Stephen M. Walt of Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government. Published in the March 23, 2006, issue of the London Review of Books and posted as a "working paper" on the Kennedy School's Web site, the report has been debated in the coffeehouses of Cairo and in the editorial offices of Haaretz. It's been called "smelly" (Christopher Hitchens), "nutty" (Max Boot), "conspiratorial" (the Anti-Defamation League), "oddly amateurish" (the Forward), and "brave" (Philip Weiss in The Nation). It's prompted intense speculation over why The New York Times has given it so little attention and why The Atlantic Monthly, which originally commissioned the essay, rejected it.

The objects of all this controversy are two eminent members of the academic establishment. Mearsheimer is a graduate of West Point, a veteran of five years in the Air Force, and the author of three books, including *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. In 1989, Mearsheimer persuaded Walt to leave Princeton and to join the faculty at Chicago, and they worked closely together until 1999, when Walt left for Harvard's Kennedy School; he's been its academic dean for the last three years. Last year, he published *Taming American Power: The Global Response to US Primacy*. As their book titles suggest, both professors belong to the "realist" school of international relations, viewing national interest as the only effective ground for making foreign policy.

In their paper (the Web version runs eighty-two pages, forty of them footnotes), Mearsheimer and Walt argue that the centerpiece of US policy in the Middle East has been its unwavering support for Israel, and that this has not been in America's best

interest. In their view, the "extraordinary generosity" the US showers on Israel— the nearly \$3 billion in direct foreign assistance it provides every year, the access it gives Israel to "top-drawer" weapons like F-16 jets, the thirty-two UN Security Council resolutions critical of Israel that it has vetoed since 1982, the "wide latitude" it has given Israel in dealing with the occupied territories—all this "might be understandable if Israel were a vital strategic asset or if there were a compelling moral case for sustained US backing." In fact, they write, "neither rationale is convincing." Israel may have had strategic value for the US during the cold war when the Soviet Union had heavy influence in Egypt and Syria, but that has long since faded. Since September 11, Israel has been cast as a crucial ally in the war on terror, but actually, according to Mearsheimer and Walt, it has been more of a liability; its close ties to America have served as a rallying point for Osama bin Laden and other anti-American extremists. Morally, Israel qualifies as a democracy, the authors write, but it's a deeply flawed one, discriminating against its Arab citizens and oppressing the Palestinians who have lived under its occupation.

If neither strategic nor moral considerations can account for America's support for Israel, Mearsheimer and Walt ask, what does? Their answer: the "unmatched power of the Israel Lobby." At its core is the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), which is ranked second after the National Rifle Association (along with the AARP) in the National Journal's 2005 listing of Washington's most powerful lobbies. AIPAC, they write, serves as "a de facto agent for a foreign government." The lobby, they say, is also associated with Christian evangelicals such as Tom DeLay, Jerry Falwell, and Pat Robertson; neoconservatives both Jewish (Paul Wolfowitz, Bernard Lewis, and William Kristol) and gentile (John Bolton, William Bennett, and George Will); think tanks (the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, the American Enterprise Institute, the Hudson Institute); and critics of the press such as the Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America.

While other special-interest groups influence US foreign policy, Mearsheimer and Walt say, no lobby has managed to divert it "as far from what the American national interest would otherwise suggest, while simultaneously convincing Americans that US and Israeli interests are essentially identical." The result has turned the US into an "enabler" of Israeli expansion in the occupied territories, "making it complicit in the crimes perpetrated against the Palestinians." Pressure from AIPAC and Israel was also a "critical element" in the US decision to invade Iraq, they write, arguing that the war "was motivated in good part by a desire to make Israel more secure."

Finally, the professors maintain, the lobby has created a climate in which anyone who calls attention to its power is deemed anti-Semitic, a device designed to stifle discussion "by intimidation." They end with a call for a "more open debate" about the lobby's influence and the consequences it has had for America's place in the world.

Such points have been made before, but rarely by such hardheaded members of the academic establishment. And the response has been furious. Leading the way has been The New York Sun, whose lead story of March 20 was headed "David Duke Claims to Be Vindicated by a Harvard Dean." Duke, the white supremacist, was quoted as calling the paper "excellent" and a "great step forward." "It is quite satisfying," Duke said, "to see a body in the premier American University essentially come out and validate every major point I have been making since even before the [Iraq] war even started." "Harvard's Paper on Israel Called 'Trash' by Solon," went another headline two days later, the Solon in this case being New York congressman Eliot Engel, who said, "Given what happened in the Holocaust, it's shameful that

people would write reports like this." Congressman Jerrold Nadler called the paper "a meretricious, dishonest piece of crap," while Marvin Kalb, who teaches at the Kennedy School, expressed disappointment "that a paper of this quality appeared under the Kennedy School label."

In The Washington Post, Eliot A. Cohen, a professor at John Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies, wrote that he was "a public intellectual and a proud Jew" who was about to celebrate Passover with his oldest son, who was

on leave from the bomb-strewn streets of Baghdad.... Other supposed members of "The Lobby" also have children in military service. Impugning their patriotism or mine is not scholarship or policy advocacy. It is merely, and unforgivably, bigotry.

David Gergen of US News & World Report expressed shock at the professors' charges, writing that they were "wildly at variance with what I have personally witnessed in the Oval Office" while serving four presidents. "I never once saw a decision in the Oval Office to tilt US foreign policy in favor of Israel at the expense of America's interest." "As a Christian," he wrote,

let me add that it is also wrong and unfair to call into question the loyalty of millions of American Jews who have faithfully supported Israel while also working tirelessly and generously to advance America's cause, both at home and abroad. They are among our finest citizens and should be praised, not pilloried.

No one, however, was more vociferous than Alan Dershowitz. A professor of law at Harvard and the author of *The Case for Israel*, Dershowitz was quoted in the Sun as claiming he had proof that the authors had gotten some of their information from neo-Nazi Web sites. Dershowitz (whom the professors call an "American apologist" for Israel) hurriedly drafted a forty-three-page rebuttal and arranged for it to be posted on the same "working papers" site at the Kennedy School. "As an advocate of free speech and an opponent of censorship based on political correctness," he wrote, "I welcome serious, balanced, objective study of the influence of lobbies—including Israeli lobbies—on American foreign policy." But, he added,

this study is so filled with distortions, so empty of originality or new evidence, so tendentious in its tone, so lacking in nuance and balance, so unscholarly in its approach, so riddled with obvious factual errors that could easily have been checked (but obviously were not), and so dependent on biased, extremist and anti-American sources, as to raise the question of motive: what would motivate two well-recognized academics to depart so grossly from their usual standards of academic writing and research in order to produce a "study paper" that contributes so little to the existing scholarship while being so susceptible to misuse?

Dershowitz went on to note that the implication of the paper—that American Jews put the interests of Israel before those of America—"raises the ugly specter of 'dual loyalty,' a canard that has haunted Diaspora Jews from time immemorial." He ended by challenging Mearsheimer and Walt to a debate.

The study also drew criticism from the left, notably from Noam Chomsky. While Mearsheimer and Walt "deserve credit" for taking a position "that is sure to elicit tantrums and fanatical lies," he wrote, their thesis was "not very" convincing, for it ignored the influence that oil companies have had on US policy in the Persian Gulf,

and it overlooked the extent to which the US-Israeli alliance performed "a huge service" for "US-Saudis-Energy corporations" by "smashing secular Arab nationalism, which threatened to divert resources to domestic needs." US policy in the Middle East, Chomsky argued, is no different from that in other parts of the world, and the Israeli government had helped implement it, by, for instance, enabling the Reagan administration to "evade congressional barriers to carrying out massive terror in Central America." Many would find the Mearsheimer-Walt thesis appealing, he wrote, because it leaves the US government "untouched on its high pinnacle of nobility," its Wilsonian impulses distorted by "an all-powerful force [i.e., the lobby] that it cannot escape."

Here and there, some voices were raised in support of the professors. The Washington Post's Richard Cohen called the citing of David Duke's support for the paper a McCarthyite tactic and said the linking of Mearsheimer and Walt to hate groups was a form of "rank guilt by association" that "does not in any way rebut the argument made in their paper." Cohen said that he found the essay itself "unremarkable, a bit sloppy and one-sided (nothing here about the Arab oil lobby), but nothing that even a casual newspaper reader does not know. Its basic point — that Israel's American supporters have immense influence over US foreign policy—is unarguable."

In an Op-Ed piece in The New York Times, Tony Judt lamented the "somewhat hysterical response" to the paper in the United States and the "virtual silence in the mainstream media." He attributed this to a fear of feeding anti-Semitism. The result was a regrettable "failure to consider a major issue in public policy," a form of "self-censorship" that is bad for the Jews, bad for Israel, and above all bad for the United States. With East Asia growing daily and "our clumsy failure to recast the Middle East" coming "into sharp focus," Judt acidly wrote, the strategic debate is fast changing, and "it will not be self-evident to future generations of Americans why the imperial might and international reputation of the United States are so closely aligned with one small, controversial Mediterranean client state."

Some of the most interesting responses came from Israel. Haaretz, the liberal daily, reflected in an editorial that whatever the article's weaknesses, it would be "irresponsible" to ignore its "serious and disturbing message." Instead of seeking to strengthen the Israeli lobby so that it can push US policymakers to back Israel "unreservedly," the paper said, "the Israeli government must understand that the world will not wait forever for Israel to withdraw from the territories, and that the opinions expressed in the article could take root in American politics if Israel does not change the political reality quickly." The essay, concluded the newspaper, "does not deserve condemnation; rather, it should serve as a warning sign."

Hysterical does seem an apt word for the reaction to "The Israel Lobby." The paper seems to have brought out the worst in its critics, as when Eliot Cohen, rather than seriously discuss the issues at hand, makes a point of his son's military service. In The New Republic, Michael Oren, a senior fellow at the Shalem Center in Jerusalem, pinned the blame for the essay on the late Edward Said, accusing him of creating a climate on college campuses in which such anti-Israel views could flourish. The coverage in the Sun has been particularly scurrilous in its attempt to blacken the authors' reputation while diverting attention from their ideas.

It must be said, however, that "The Israel Lobby" has some serious shortcomings, and that these have contributed to the vehemence of the response. First,

Mearsheimer and Walt have made some factual errors. The most glaring, as others have pointed out, is their assertion that Israeli citizenship is based on the principle of "blood kinship." It's not—Israel has about 1.3 million Arab citizens. Mearsheimer and Walt have obviously confused Israel's citizenship laws with its law of return, which grants every Jew in the world the right to settle in the country. It's an embarrassing mistake, though hardly a fatal one—the law of return itself obviously favors Jews; Arabs outside Israel have no such privilege of obtaining Israeli citizenship. But the critics have reacted sharply, with Alan Dershowitz declaring that "this mendacious emphasis on Jewish 'blood' is a favorite of neo-Nazi propaganda."

Mearsheimer and Walt have also used some quotes from David Ben-Gurion badly out of context. In a discussion of Zionist policies in Palestine prior to the creation of Israel, for example, the professors have Ben-Gurion saying that "after the formation of a large army in the wake of the establishment of the state, we shall abolish partition and expand to the whole of Palestine." The clear implication, as Dershowitz notes in his rebuttal, is that this expansion will be accomplished by force. Yet, Dershowitz points out, Ben-Gurion was asked in a follow-up question whether he meant to achieve this "by force." No, he replied, it would be achieved "through mutual understanding and Jewish-Arab agreement"—a qualifier Mearsheimer and Walt omit.

This distortion of Ben-Gurion's statements comes in a section in which Mearsheimer and Walt lay out the "dwindling moral case" for supporting Israel. Their conclusions are very harsh. While the creation of Israel was "an appropriate response" to a long record of crimes against Jews, they write, that act "involved additional crimes against a largely innocent third party: the Palestinians." Israeli officials long claimed that the 700,000 Arabs who fled during the 1947–1948 war did so "because their leaders told them to," Mearsheimer and Walt write, but Israeli revisionists like Benny Morris, they say, have shown that most of them fled out of "fear of violent death at the hands of Zionist forces." The war, they go on, "involved explicit acts of ethnic cleansing, including executions, massacres, and rapes by Jews." Israel's subsequent conduct toward the Arabs and Palestinians has been no less brutal, "belying any claim to morally superior conduct." They cite the murdering of hundreds of Egyptian prisoners of war in 1956 and 1967, the beating of thousands of young people during the first intifada, and the conversion of the IDF into a "killing machine" during the second.

The Palestinians "have used terrorism against their Israeli occupiers," Mearsheimer and Walt write, adding that "their willingness to attack innocent civilians is wrong." But, they hasten to add, "this behavior is not surprising," for "the Palestinians believe they have no other way to force Israeli concessions." What's more, Zionist organizations fighting to create the state of Israel also used terrorism. "If the Palestinians' use of terrorism is morally reprehensible today," they declare, "so was Israel's reliance upon it in the past, and thus one cannot justify US support for Israel on the grounds that its past conduct was morally superior."

This seems an unconvincing line of reasoning, one that makes current judgments depend excessively on the events of the 1940s and that can also be used to justify suicide bombers today. There is no doubt that Israeli forces have killed many innocent civilians during the second intifada and deserve to be condemned for it; but to minimize the violence against Israel is both dubious morally and vulnerable as an argument. The lack of a clearer and fuller account of Palestinian violence is a serious failing of the essay. Its tendency to emphasize Israel's offenses while largely

overlooking those of its adversaries has troubled even many doves. "If you follow their logic, they imply that the US should allow Israel to be defeated," I was told by Lewis Roth, an assistant executive director of Americans for Peace Now, a leading critic of Israel's occupation and its policy toward Palestinians.

Benny Morris, whom Mearsheimer and Walt frequently cite, dismissed their work in *The New Republic* as "a travesty of the history that I have studied and written for the past two decades." He faulted them, among other things, for exaggerating Israel's military superiority over the Arabs, falsely accusing Israel of adopting a policy of expelling Arabs in 1948, downplaying Palestinian attacks on civilians, and overlooking Israel's general acceptance of a two-state solution from Rabin on. (Yet Morris's account itself seems highly selective; he completely ignores Israel's long history of West Bank settlements and other activities in the occupied territories, and he glosses over IDF killings of civilians during the second intifada.)

Another problem in Mearsheimer and Walt's essay is its thin documentation. In seeking to demonstrate the lobby's negative influence, they don't provide decisive evidence for their accusations. They maintain, for instance, that AIPAC "has a stranglehold on the US Congress," the result of "its ability to reward legislators and congressional candidates who support its agenda, and to punish those who challenge it." Yet they cite only one example—AIPAC's part in defeating Illinois Senator Charles Percy in 1984 for making criticisms of Israel. Not only is this example more than twenty years old, but it relies on a two-sentence boast from a former AIPAC official about how the organization managed to oust Percy. No details are offered about what Percy did to arouse AIPAC, what AIPAC did to defeat him, or what Percy himself has to say about the matter. As with practically all of their accusations, the authors rely on published reports and have failed to interview either the lobbyists, their supporters, or their critics.

Similarly, in advancing their claim that the Israel lobby pushed the US into the Iraq war, Mearsheimer and Walt offer several disparate bits of evidence: a quote from Philip Zelikow, a former member of the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, about how the "real threat" from Iraq was not to the United States but to Israel; Op-Ed pieces by former prime ministers Ehud Barak and Benjamin Netanyahu calling on the Bush administration to act against Iraq; a report in *Haaretz* that the Israeli "military and political leadership yearns for war in Iraq"; an editorial in the *Forward* noting that America's top Jewish organizations were supporting the war; and the backing that neoconservatives like Paul Wolfowitz and Richard Perle and experts like Bernard Lewis provided the administration when it was attempting to win public support for the war. From such material they conclude, "There is little doubt that Israel and the Lobby were key factors in shaping the decision for war."

Maybe so, but there are many other contending explanations for the administration's action—ousting a regime seen as threatening to US interests, of which protection of Israel was one; overthrowing a tyrant who had brutally oppressed his people; projecting US power in the region with an eye to securing oil supplies in Saudi Arabia as well as Iraq; and setting off a process of democratization that, at least in neocon fancy, would transform the Middle East. In light of these other explanations, it would take a much fuller and richly sourced discussion than the one presented by the authors to make their case seem convincing.

Overall, the lack of firsthand research in "The Israel Lobby" gives it a secondhand feel. Mearsheimer and Walt provide little sense of how AIPAC and other lobbying

groups work, how they seek to influence policy, and what people in government have to say about them. The authors seem to have concluded that in view of the sensitivity of the subject, few people would talk frankly about it. In fact, many people are fed up with the lobby and eager to explain why (though often not on the record). Federal campaign documents offer another important source of information that the authors have ignored. Through such sources, it's possible to show that, on their central point—the power of the Israel lobby and the negative effect it has had on US policy—Mearsheimer and Walt are entirely correct.

Any discussion of AIPAC's activities must begin with the policy conference it sponsors each year in Washington, a combination of trade show, party convention, and Hollywood extravaganza that seems designed to show AIPAC's national power. On Sunday, March 5, 2006, the start of this year's gathering, five thousand pro-Israel activists from around the country crowded into the Washington Convention Center. During the next three days, they listened to speeches, sat in on panels, chatted at receptions, and attended a book signing by Natan Sharansky. The crowd included more than a thousand college and high school students, mobilized through AIPAC's ambitious campus advocacy program. Speakers included a cross-section of Washington's political establishment—John Bolton, Newt Gingrich, Senators Evan Bayh and Susan Collins, House Majority Whip Roy Blunt—as well as all three Israeli candidates for prime minister (speaking via satellite from Israel, where they were campaigning). On several giant screens around the hall there flashed alternating clips of Adolf Hitler denouncing the Jews and Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad vowing to destroy Israel. The show ended with a fade-out to the post-Holocaust vow "Never Again."

The next day, members of the conference went to Capitol Hill to lobby for AIPAC's top legislative priority—the Palestinian Anti-Terrorism Act of 2006. Drafted with AIPAC's help following Hamas's recent electoral victory, the bill placed so many restrictions on aid to, and contacts with, the Palestinian Authority that even the Israeli government, seeking more flexibility, had expressed some unease about it. Already, though, the bill had more than two hundred sponsors in the House; now, to press the point, supporters of AIPAC held meetings in more than 450 congressional offices. At dinner that night, AIPAC Executive Director Howard Kohr, as he does each year, read the "roll call" of dignitaries in attendance. It included a majority of the Senate, a quarter of the House, more than fifty ambassadors, and dozens of administration officials. Reciting the names took twenty-seven minutes in all, with each name greeted by a roar, the loudest going to Joe Lieberman.

The conference ended the next day with a speech by Dick Cheney. The Vice President used the occasion to deliver the administration's sternest warning yet to the government of Iran, promising that it would face "meaningful consequences" if it continued to pursue nuclear technology. "We join other nations in sending that regime a clear message: We will not allow Iran to have a nuclear weapon," Cheney declared to loud applause. For the AIPAC faithful, Cheney ranks as a true American hero.

For many American Jews, of course, Cheney is nothing of the sort. On most issues, Jews are quite liberal, and the issue of Israel is no exception. J.J. Goldberg, the editor of the *Forward*, observes that opinion surveys consistently show that "a majority of American Jews favor Palestinian statehood, and that a significant majority favor ceding a significant amount of territory on the West Bank and withdrawing from the settlements."

AIPAC claims to represent most of the Jewish community. Its executive committee has a couple of hundred members representing a wide spectrum of American Jewish opinion, from the dovish Americans for Peace Now to the militantly right-wing Zionist Organization of America. Four times a year this group meets to decide AIPAC policy. According to several former AIPAC officials I have talked to, however, the executive committee has little real power. Rather, power rests with the fifty-odd-member board of directors, which is selected not according to how well they represent AIPAC's members but according to how much money they give and raise.

Reflecting this, the board is thick with corporate lawyers, Wall Street investors, business executives, and heirs to family fortunes. Within the board itself, power is concentrated in an extremely rich subgroup, known as the "minyan club." And, within that group, four members are dominant: Robert Asher, a retired lighting fixtures dealer in Chicago; Edward Levy, a building supplies executive in Detroit; Mayer "Bubba" Mitchell, a construction materials dealer in Mobile, Alabama; and Larry Weinberg, a real estate developer in Los Angeles (and a former owner of the Portland Trail Blazers). Asher, Levy, and Mitchell are loyal Republicans; Weinberg is a Scoop Jackson Democrat who has moved rightward over the years.

The "Gang of Four," as these men are known, do not share the general interest of a large part of the Jewish community in promoting peace in the Middle East. Rather, they seek to keep Israel strong, the Palestinians weak, and the United States from exerting pressure on Israel. AIPAC's director, Howard Kohr, is a conservative Republican long used to doing the Gang of Four's bidding. For many years Steven Rosen, AIPAC's director of foreign policy issues, was the main power on the staff, helping to shape the Gang of Four's pro-Likud beliefs into practical measures that AIPAC could promote in Congress. (In 2005, Rosen and fellow AIPAC analyst Keith Weissman left the organization and were soon after indicted by federal authorities for receiving classified national security information and passing it on to foreign (Israeli) officials.)

AIPAC's defenders like to argue that its success is explained by its ability to exploit the organizing opportunities available in democratic America. To some extent, this is true. AIPAC has a formidable network of supporters throughout the US. Its 100,000 members—up 60 percent from five years ago—are guided by AIPAC's nine regional offices, its ten satellite offices, and its one-hundred-person-plus Washington staff, a highly professional group that includes lobbyists, researchers, analysts, organizers, and publicists, backed by an enormous \$47 million annual budget. AIPAC's staff is famous on Capitol Hill for its skill in gathering up-to-the-minute information about Middle Eastern affairs and working it up into neatly digestible and carefully slanted policy packages, on which many congressional staffers have come to rely.

Such an account, however, overlooks a key element in AIPAC's success: money. AIPAC itself is not a political action committee. Rather, by assessing voting records and public statements, it provides information to such committees, which donate money to candidates; AIPAC helps them to decide who Israel's friends are according to AIPAC's criteria. The Center for Responsive Politics, a nonpartisan group that analyzes political contributions, lists a total of thirty-six pro-Israel PACs, which together contributed \$3.14 million to candidates in the 2004 election cycle. Pro-Israel donors give many millions more. Over the last five years, for instance, Robert Asher, together with his various relatives (a common device used to maximize

contributions), has donated \$148,000, mostly in sums of \$1,000 or \$2,000 to individual candidates.

A former AIPAC staff member described for me how the system works. A candidate will contact AIPAC and express strong sympathies with Israel. AIPAC will point out that it doesn't endorse candidates but will offer to introduce him to people who do. Someone affiliated with AIPAC will be assigned to the candidate to act as a contact person. Checks for \$500 or \$1,000 from pro-Israel donors will be bundled together and provided to the candidate with a clear indication of the donors' political views. (All of this is perfectly legal.) In addition, meetings to raise funds will be organized in various cities. Often, the candidates are from states with negligible Jewish populations.

One congressional staff member told me of the case of a Democratic candidate from a mountain state who, eager to tap into pro-Israel money, got in touch with AIPAC, which assigned him to a Manhattan software executive eager to move up in AIPAC's organization. The executive held a fund-raising reception in his apartment on the Upper West Side, and the candidate left with \$15,000. In his state's small market for press and televised ads, that sum proved an important factor in a race he narrowly won. The congressman thus became one of hundreds of members who could be relied upon to vote AIPAC's way. (The staffer told me the name of the congressman but asked that I withhold it in order to spare him embarrassment.)

Conversely, candidates who challenge AIPAC can find their funds suddenly dry up. Two well-publicized cases are those of Representatives Cynthia McKinney of Georgia and Earl Hilliard of Alabama, both African-Americans. In 2002, McKinney and Hilliard were alleged to have made statements or taken positions critical of Israel, and their primary opponents received large amounts of pro-Israel money. Both candidates had limited public support and ended up losing. Cases such as these occur infrequently: a candidate's position on Israel is rarely enough by itself to cause defeat. But it can have a very large effect on fund-raising. (McKinney was reelected to Congress in 2004.)

In 1981, after leaving the Senate, Adlai Stevenson III decided to run for governor of Illinois. In the late 1970s, Stevenson had introduced an amendment to an appropriations bill in the Senate that would have cut US aid to Israel by \$200 million until such time as the president could certify that Israel's settlements policy was consistent with US policy. The amendment failed, but, as Stevenson told me, "the Israeli lobby lowered the boom. The money dried up." The campaign, he told me, became demoralized, and his poll ratings dropped. In the end the race was so close that it was finally decided by the Illinois Supreme Court in favor of his opponent, Jim Thompson. The drop in funds, Stevenson says, "was critical."

Cases such as this "happen almost once a year," I was told by a Democratic congressman (who asked not to be named). Emphasizing that Israel "is never the sole thing" that causes a defeat, he proceeded to give a list of several politicians who had suffered because they had offended AIPAC. They include Tony Beilenson in Los Angeles (because he had wanted to divert one percent of all US foreign aid—including aid to Israel—to help drought victims in sub-Saharan Africa); John Bryant of Texas (for seeking to withhold funds in order to protest Israel's settlements policy); and James Moran of Virginia, who found that his anticipated election funds dropped several tens of thousands of dollars after he said at a town meeting in 2003

that the Iraq war would not have been fought had it not been for the strong support of the Jewish community. (Both Bryant and Moran won anyway.)

This year, pro-Israel forces are targeting Senator Lincoln Chafee of Rhode Island. A Republican, Chafee has taken a number of positions that run counter to AIPAC's, including a vote against the Syria Accountability Act, which prepared the way for US sanctions against that country. His challenger in the Republican primary, Stephen Laffey, has taken a strong pro-Israel position, and already he has received \$5,000 (the maximum allowed) from the pro-Israel Washington Political Action Committee. In a recent report, the Forward noted that a Providence lawyer and pro-Israel activist named Norman Orodener was preparing to send out a letter to other pro-Israel PACs praising Laffey's lifelong record of support for Israel.

Democrats, though, still get most of the pro-Israel dollars. Among AIPAC's staunchest backers in Congress are such well-known liberals as Nancy Pelosi, Henry Waxman, Jerrold Nadler, and Howard Berman. Steny Hoyer, the House minority whip, is so reliable that "he might as well be on the AIPAC payroll," a congressional staffer told me. Hillary Clinton is equally dependable. Still attempting to live down her 1998 declaration of support for a Palestinian state and the kiss she gave Suha Arafat in 1999, Clinton has sought to compensate by voting AIPAC's way on almost every issue. In the current election cycle, she has received \$80,000 in pro-Israel money—more than any other congressional candidate.

Partly as a result of such giving, says one Hill staffer, "We can count on well over half the House—250 to 300 members—to do reflexively whatever AIPAC wants."

What AIPAC wants can be summed up very succinctly: a powerful Israel free to occupy the territory it chooses; enfeebled Palestinians; and unquestioning support for Israel by the United States. AIPAC is skeptical of negotiations and peace accords, along with the efforts by Israeli doves, the Palestinians, and Americans to promote them. During the 1980s, when Israel was aggressively expanding its presence on the West Bank, AIPAC had a very close relationship with the Israeli government, especially the Likud leader Yitzhak Shamir. That quickly changed in 1992, with the election of Labor's Yitzhak Rabin. On a visit to Washington soon after taking power, he admonished AIPAC for having cozy ties with the Likud. No longer, Rabin said, would the organization act as Jerusalem's representative in Washington.

When Rabin and Arafat signed the Oslo accords in 1993, AIPAC officially endorsed them, but—in contrast to its outspoken support of Likud policies—it remained largely silent. Seeing the Palestinians as terrorists who could not be trusted, the lobby looked for a way to subtly undermine the accords. It found one in the issue of where the US embassy in Israel should be located. Unlike all but two countries in the world (Costa Rica and El Salvador), the United States had its embassy not in Jerusalem but in Tel Aviv, in recognition of Jerusalem's contested status. Under the Oslo accords, the city's final disposition was to be taken up in talks set to begin in May 1996 and to conclude three years later.

But pro-Israel activists in Congress were unwilling to wait. They got an unexpected boost in early 1995, when Republicans took control of the House. The new speaker, Newt Gingrich—casting about for ways to steer Jewish money and votes away from the Democrats—announced on a visit to Israel in January that he was going to support the transfer of the US embassy to Jerusalem. In the Senate, Bob Dole, who had never shown much regard for Israel but who was preparing to challenge Bill

Clinton for the presidency, said at that year's AIPAC policy conference that he would support legislation mandating the transfer. He got a standing ovation.

Both Rabin and Bill Clinton were opposed to moving the embassy. They knew that such a step, by inflaming the Arab world, could disrupt the peace process. But for AIPAC and its allies, that was precisely the point. In October 1995 the Jerusalem Embassy Act overwhelmingly passed both houses of Congress. The act mandated the transfer of the embassy to Jerusalem by 1999, unless the president invoked a national security waiver. Unwilling to challenge AIPAC, President Clinton let the bill become law without signing it. As anticipated, vehement protests came from every Arab capital. Clinton duly invoked the waiver, so no transfer occurred, but every six months his administration had to submit to Congress a report explaining how it was complying with the law. And members of Congress, eager to demonstrate their support for Israel, continued to produce a stream of resolutions and letters demanding the embassy's transfer. The strain on the Oslo accords was intense.

It became even more so when Hillary Clinton decided to run for the Senate in New York. Wanting to court the all-important Jewish vote, she early on declared Jerusalem "the eternal and indivisible capital of Israel," and throughout the remainder of the race she and her Republican opponent Rick Lazio argued in synagogues and speeches over who would be the quickest to move the embassy to Jerusalem.

By then, Bill Clinton was overseeing the Camp David peace talks. Every time the issue of the embassy transfer was mentioned in the news, the Palestinians objected, and America's ability to serve as an honest broker was undermined. "I wasn't thrilled with their emphasis on moving the embassy," recalls Dennis Ross, Clinton's chief negotiator. As he observes, the Israel lobby ultimately did not succeed—the embassy was never moved—but the semiannual need to invoke the waiver and report to Congress "put a burden on us. It took up a lot of our time."

A Clinton Middle East adviser points to the embassy issue as an example of how the Israel lobby works. Like all lobbies, he says, it's "very effective at creating background noise." When an administration considers taking a position on some issue, it must weigh the potential gain against the "downside"—the "constant barrage" from the press, Congress, and domestic interest groups. If it's going to require a constant, time-consuming effort, "then you ask, is it worth it?" By raising the embassy issue over and over, AIPAC was able to create a lot of background noise.

In late 2000, when the intifada began, the former Clinton adviser told me, there were cases in which Israel used what seemed to many to be excessive force, such as breaking the bones of young Palestinians, and exacerbated the conflict in doing so. But if administration officials had said anything "that smacked of 'moral equivalency,'" he observed, "it would have gotten us attacks from Congress, the media, and interest groups." After a while, he continued, officials begin to shy away from saying anything that might become controversial domestically, leading to

self-censorship in speech and action. There were many policy initiatives we were considering where we'd have to address how certain domestic constituencies would react. There was a sense of weigh-ing what the costs would be of being viewed publicly as pressuring Israel.

As this official points out, while AIPAC focuses most of its efforts on Congress, the executive branch is more often lobbied by the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations. This group is far less known than AIPAC but nearly as powerful. Made up of the heads of more than fifty American Jewish organizations, the Conference of Presidents is supposed to represent the collective voice of the American Jewish community, which, as noted, tends to be dovish on Middle East matters.

In practice, though, the organization is run by its executive vice-chairman, Malcolm Hoenlein, who has long been close to the settlers' movement; for several years in the mid-1990s, he served as an associate chair for the annual fund-raising dinners held in New York for Bet El, a militant settlement near Ramallah. In his twenty years with the conference, Hoenlein has used it to make sure Israel has the right to pursue whatever policies it chooses— including expanding its presence on the West Bank— without any interference from the United States. During the Clinton years, the Conference of Presidents was an enthusiastic party to the campaign to move the US embassy to Jerusalem.

Sometimes, the former Clinton official noted, the pressures on US policy come from domestic groups, sometimes they come from Israel, and sometimes they come from Israel using its allies in the US to influence administration policy. When Bibi Netanyahu was premier between 1996 and 1999, the former official recalls, "he made the implicit threat that he could mobilize allies on the Hill or on the Christian right if President Clinton did not do what he wanted." Later, at Camp David, "Barak made a whole lot of calls when he felt he came under too much pressure—calls to allies in the Jewish community, and to politicians."

Since 2001, the need to use such pressures has diminished, for George Bush generally shares AIPAC's reluctance to try to bring Israelis and Palestinians together. But on those few occasions when the President has tried to do so, the lobby has moved quickly to discourage him. A good example occurred in April 2003, when Bush introduced his "road map" for the Middle East. The map stipulated a series of parallel steps that Israel and the Palestinians were to undertake simultaneously, leading to the creation of an independent Palestinian state by the year 2005. The plan reflected the administration's conviction that, as it prepared to invade Iraq, it needed to show the Arab world that it was actively working to resolve the Israeli–Palestinian impasse. But the requirement that Israel take steps toward a settlement in conjunction with the Palestinians seemed to both AIPAC and the Sharon government an objectionable use of political pressure, and the lobby worked with its friends in Congress to issue a letter saying as much. The road map ultimately failed. This was caused by several factors, not least the continuing violence in the region, but the pressures from AIPAC certainly contributed.

Throughout all this, AIPAC has continued to organize resolutions, bills, and letters on Capitol Hill expressing fierce support for Israel and hostility toward its adversaries. More than a hundred such initiatives emerge from Congress every year, part of a cynical, routinized process designed to show a member's fealty to Israel and thus his eligibility to receive pro-Israel funds. And it can be "suicidal" to resist, says M.J. Rosenberg, who is the Washington director of the Israel Policy Forum, which seeks US support for a two-state solution, and who worked for AIPAC between 1982 and 1986. He adds:

I worked on Capitol Hill for almost twenty years and, basically, criticizing AIPAC or defying it on some resolution is a sure way to get a staffer in serious trouble. I don't think they can defeat a member of Congress, not even in New York, but for staffers, reporters, people like me who work for Jewish organizations, they will try to get you fired or block your chances of advancement. They issue threats and they definitely believe they are more important than members of Congress.

(For an example of a congresswoman's reaction to AIPAC's tactics, see the letter in the box on page 73.)

All the measures pouring out of Congress convey a very clear message. As one congressman put it:

We're so predictable, so supportive, so unquestioning, of Israel's actions that in the long run we've alienated much of the Arab world. We've passed any number of resolutions making it clear that we didn't want Clinton or Bush to put pressure on Israel with regard to settlements, or negotiations. If we passed a resolution that fully embraced the road map, it would make an enormous difference in the Arab world, and it would help undermine terrorists. But you would never get a measure like that through the international relations or appropriations committees. Congress would never pass a resolution that was in any way critical of anything Israel has done.

I asked the congressman if he was willing to be identified. He said no.

The political landscape in Israel is rapidly changing, and along with it the challenges facing the Israel lobby. The rise of Kadema and the shift away from the Likud have reinvigorated the three main groups that represent America's pro-Israel doves: Americans for Peace Now, Brit Tzedek, and the Israel Policy Forum (IPF). Politically, these groups more faithfully represent the views of American Jews than AIPAC does, but they have much less influence, in part because they don't raise money. In the past, the IPF's annual dinners have been sedate affairs compared to AIPAC's, but at its last one, in June, Ehud Olmert appeared, and he joked about how odd it was for an old Likudnik like himself to be there. He talked of new "policies" that would bring "peace and security to ourselves and to the Palestinians," who "will live alongside the State of Israel in an independent state of their own."

In spite of such statements, some liberal commentators in Israel and the US believe that Israel has no intention of ceding to the Palestinians enough territory and authority for a workable state. But if Israel did manage to withdraw behind a security fence and allowed such a state to emerge, what would AIPAC have left to do? Plenty. While pursuing its traditional concerns about Israel, the lobby in recent years has been steadily expanding its mission, becoming a strong force in the extended network of national security groups and leaders who have used September 11, the war on terror, and Israel as a basis for seeking a more aggressive US stance in the world.

This is especially apparent in AIPAC's work on Iran. Since the mid-1990s, AIPAC has been devoting much of its energy to warning against Iran's development of nuclear weapons, to denouncing the mullahs in Tehran, and to seeking their overthrow. Mearsheimer and Walt place much emphasis on the lobby's support for war in Iraq,

but AIPAC's work on Iran has had far more impact in Washington (assisted as it is by the aggressive rhetoric and actions of President Ahmadinejad). The network with which AIPAC is associated, it should be said, does not constitute any sort of conspiracy or cabal; its various parts and members work independently and often take positions at odds with one another. Still, it would be foolish to ignore the very real ways in which their activities tend to reinforce one another as they agitate for a more muscular US presence in the Middle East and beyond.

One key part of the network is the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. AIPAC helped to create this think tank in 1985, with Martin Indyk, AIPAC's research director, becoming its first director. Today, the Washington Institute is fully independent of AIPAC, and there is some diversity among its fellows (Dennis Ross is one). Overall, though, its policies mirror AIPAC's. Its executive director, Robert Satloff, is a neoconservative with very hawkish views on the Middle East. Its deputy director of research, Patrick Clawson, has been a leading proponent of regime change in Iran and of a US confrontation with Tehran over its nuclear program. (AIPAC features him as an expert on its Web site.) Raymond Tanter, an adjunct scholar at the institute, has been championing the MEK, or People's Mujaheddin, a shadowy group of Iranian guerrillas who want to overthrow the government in Tehran (and whom the State Department regards as terrorists). Members of the Washington Institute's board of advisers include Paul Wolfowitz, Richard Perle, James Woolsey, Jeane Kirkpatrick, Mort Zuckerman, and Max Kampelman; its single most important source of funding is Larry Weinberg, one of AIPAC's Gang of Four, and his wife Barbi.

Kampelman, Kirkpatrick, Perle, and Woolsey also sit on the advisory board of the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs (JINSA), which, as its Web site notes, seeks "to inform the American defense and foreign affairs community about the important role Israel can and does play in bolstering democratic interests in the Mediterranean and the Middle East." To describe its program more bluntly, JINSA seeks to educate gentile members of the Pentagon in the strategic value of Israel to the United States. About half its fifty-six board members are US generals and admirals. Other members include Stephen Solarz, who while a New York congressman worked tirelessly on Israel's behalf; Eric Cantor, the only Jewish Republican in the House, who in 2002 was named the chief deputy majority whip—part of the ongoing Republican program to lure pro-Israel dollars from the Democrats; and Stephen Bryen, a neoconservative who served under Richard Perle in Ronald Reagan's Pentagon and who is now a defense contractor.

Richard Perle, in addition to sitting on the boards of both the Washington Institute and JINSA, is a resident fellow at the American Enterprise Institute. So are Joshua Muravchik, a neocon who's also an adjunct scholar at the Washington Institute; Michael Rubin, an up-and-coming neocon who worked in the Pentagon's Office of Special Plans before becoming a political adviser to the Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq; and Michael Ledeen, who helped to set up JINSA and who has spent the last several years seeking official US backing for regime change in Iran. Together with Morris Amitay, a former executive director of AIPAC, Ledeen is an important force at the Coalition for Democracy in Iran, another advocate for overthrowing the Iranian government. Muravchik, Tanter, and Woolsey are all listed as supporters on that coalition's Web site.

Michael Rubin, meanwhile, is also the editor of *The Middle East Quarterly*, which is published by the Middle East Forum, a think tank dedicated to fighting terrorism,

countering Islamic extremism, and promoting pro-Israel views on college campuses. MEF was founded by Daniel Pipes, an energetic neoconservative whose views seem extreme even within that world. In 2002, Pipes created a Web site called Campus Watch, which "reviews and critiques" Middle East studies in North America "with an aim to improving them." (Initially, Campus Watch also encouraged students to take notes on lectures by professors critical of Israel, with the goal of "exposing" them on the MEF Web site, but this feature was dropped after it was widely condemned as a form of McCarthyism.) MEF's work on campuses parallels that of AIPAC's own college advocacy program.

Pipes is also an adjunct scholar at the Washington Institute as well as a columnist for The Jerusalem Post, whose editorial page editor, Saul Singer, is a neoconservative and is married to Wendy Singer Senior, who runs AIPAC's Jerusalem office. She is the sister of Dan Senior, who was Paul Bremer's chief spokesman at the Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq.

Pipes is also a regular contributor to The New York Sun, which is co-owned by Bruce Kovner, a hedge fund manager who ranked ninety-third on Forbes magazine's list of the 400 richest Americans and who is the chairman of the American Enterprise Institute's board of trustees, and by the money manager Roger Hertog, who is a trustee of both AEI and the Washington Institute for Near East Policy and who is a co-owner (along with former hedge fund manager Michael Steinhardt) of The New Republic. That magazine's editor in chief, Martin Peretz, another co-owner, also sits on the Washington Institute's board of advisers. One wonders if Kovner and Hertog approve of the ugliness of the Sun's campaign against Mearsheimer and Walt.

Mearsheimer and Walt's essay, meanwhile, has been the object of much study by AIPAC's research unit, which intently follows the activities of critics of Israel and of the lobby. Its "Activities Update," a compilation of dozens of press clips, speech transcripts, and minutes of meetings, is periodically e-mailed to a select list of AIPAC supporters. This research provides the raw material for AIPAC's efforts to intimidate and silence opponents. The editor of "Activities Update" is Michael Lewis, the son of Bernard Lewis, the Princeton scholar and interpreter of the Arab world who gave advice to the Bush administration in the months preceding the war in Iraq.

The nasty campaign waged against John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt has itself provided an excellent example of the bullying tactics used by the lobby and its supporters. The wide attention their argument has received shows that, in this case, those efforts have not entirely succeeded. Despite its many flaws, their essay has performed a very useful service in forcing into the open a subject that has for too long remained taboo.

ENERGY

Why Iran Is Driving Oil Up

Newsweek

By Christopher Dickey and Maziar Bahari

5/15

Shahpour Madani, feeling flush, was cruising electronics shops on Tehran's Jomhuri Street earlier this month for a flat-screen digital television. He figured he could afford

either a sleek new Sony, or a refrigerator for his wife. Decisions, decisions. "I haven't had so much money in a long time," said Madani, an accountant at the Ministry of Agriculture who got a raise last month and bonuses in March. "It's really fun to watch soccer games on a big TV." And there were so many home-entertainment possibilities to choose from. Up and down Jomhuri Street, you see masses of Malaysian DVD players, Japanese sound systems, Chinese VCRs, a consumer paradise the likes of which Iranians haven't come across for decades.

Of course, what you're really looking at is oil money that's been turned into the kinds of goods that keep people happy, or quiet, or both. While cutting back controls on imports, Tehran has jacked up salaries, pumped up pensions and doled out extra benefits from charities like the Imam Khomeini foundation. For Iran's body politic, the cash infusion is like a drug. With the enormous surge in world petroleum prices, about \$50 billion was injected into the country last year alone. And if the government's spending has created a kind of public euphoria, it's also creating an addiction. Some Iranian economists talk of a "disease." What's certain is that the regime's pathological craving for continued high oil prices has become a key factor in the crises that President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is helping to fuel, from the showdown at the United Nations over Iran's nuclear program to the exploding cost of a gallon of gas. Many factors are to blame for high oil prices--but Iran's increasing dependence on those revenues looms large among them.

The global oil market is extremely tight. About 85 million barrels are burned up every day, and that's sometimes just a little more or less than the whole world can manage to pump out of the ground. "We're in an era of just-in-time production capacity," says David Fyfe, an expert on oil supplies for the International Energy Agency in Paris. Any supply disruption--or potential disruption--makes traders jump out of their seats and prices go through the ceiling. Hurricanes in the Gulf of Mexico, guerrillas in Nigeria, political grandstanding in Latin America, war and sabotage in Iraq: all have helped propel the vertiginous price rise from less than \$20 a barrel at the end of 2001 to more than \$70 a barrel today.

But as a price pusher, Iran is in a class by itself. The country has the second largest proven oil reserves in the world, and on a good day exports about 2.5 million barrels. Think about a confrontation that threatens to cut off those supplies: say, talk of U.N. sanctions, speculation about Iranian retaliation, rumors of war. All have been part of the international chorus since Ahmadinejad came to office last August and announced that Iran would crank up its nuclear research. No wonder the markets are twitchy.

Now look at Iran's neighbors, especially Saudi Arabia, which has the largest proven reserves in the world and is currently pumping about 9.6 million barrels a day. Much of its oil, as well as production from Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, passes through the Strait of Hormuz, which runs along Iran's southern shore. Threaten these suppliers or supply routes and you can really make the market jump. Thus statements like the one from Iranian Interior Minister Mostafa Pourmohammadi a few weeks ago when asked about threats from the United States: "We're rich in energy sources. We have the control of one of the main energy routes in the world. If they want to use any other option, they have to know that our potential is not lower than theirs."

Tehran's rhetoric is calculated. Iran has pursued its nuclear program behind the shield of high prices, and so far the policy has worked. At the United Nations Security

Council not a single member, including the United States, has proposed boycotting Iranian oil. And while Washington may not have taken military options off the table, it hasn't put them on it, either. The mullahs, who are first and foremost interested in the survival of their regime, have gambled that eventually they can replace their oil shield with a nuclear one--and meanwhile the petro-billions will just keep rolling in.

But it's a dangerous game, longer-term. Iran's oil industry--hampered by years of mismanagement and U.S. sanctions--is a mess; the country hasn't been able to make its OPEC quota since last year, and its refineries are so inadequate that it has to import almost half the gasoline it uses. Rather than reinvesting oil revenues in new production capacity, Iran's government (like the corrupt elites of other oil-rich countries) prefers to pay off the public with big subsidies for political gain. Thus gas prices are subsidized so Iranians pay only about 10 cents a liter, which people use (or misuse) as they like. At a service station on Tehran's Pakistan Street, customer Farid Eshaghi slops about half a liter of gasoline onto the ground while filling up his tank. "Why should I be worried about wasting gas when we have so much oil in our country?" he asks.

With Iran awash in money, economist Saied Laylaz notes, the country's spending of foreign exchange has gone up from \$20 billion in 1997 to \$50 billion this year. There's less control over corruption, which was already rampant: government auditors used to scrutinize any transaction over \$10 million, says Laylaz; now the limit is \$50 million. Domestic manufactures have declined as foreign imports have increased. Privatization has essentially come to a halt as the government finds it politically convenient to throw good money after bad to subsidize decrepit national industries. And worst of all, in the view of many Iranian liberals, Ahmadinejad has bought off much of the public, stifling dissent and frustrating democracy.

A drop in oil prices could very quickly become the regime's greatest weakness. "If there's a decrease to lower than \$40 a barrel," says Laylaz, "that would create chaos in the Iranian economy." But for now, the job of talking them up is easy, thanks to all the troubles in the region. And Shahpour Madani is happy to thank Iran's president for the money with which, finally, he decides to buy his wife that new fridge. "To tell you the truth, I didn't vote for Mr. Ahmadinejad," says Madani. "But it seems that he is the first president who thinks about the well-being of the people." Of course, many an addict thinks his dealer cares about him, too.

Let's Not Play The Oil Game

Newsweek

By Richard N. Haass

5/15

No doubt it's a sign of the times. Today's war games have more to do with the falling supplies and rising price of oil than with tanks and armored personnel carriers rolling across borders. Consider just such an exercise, conducted several months ago at the World Economic Forum in Davos. The setting was late December 2006. In a simultaneous three-front strike, terrorists sank a tanker in the Bosphorus, blocking the Turkish straits linking the oilfields of the Caspian Sea with the Mediterranean. They also successfully attacked the oil port of Valdez in Alaska. An assault on the critical Ras Tanura complex in Saudi Arabia was rebuffed, but several million barrels a day (roughly 5 percent of world supply) were taken off the oil market for at least

four months.

Overnight, prices jumped to \$120. U.S. gasoline prices shot to \$5 a gallon. Participants in the game included the CEO of a major global oil company, a head of the national oil company of an important Middle East producer, senior officials from the International Energy Agency and the U.S. government, the president of a large insurance company and various counterterrorism and energy experts. I played the U.S. Secretary of State. The wargamers recommended specific steps, including parallel drawdowns of national strategic oil reserves, a temporary relaxing of environmental regulations to make it easier to refine crude oil into gasoline, lower speed limits and requirements for a minimum number of passengers in private vehicles. These relatively modest moves ensured adequate supplies but did not eliminate upward pressure on prices, which stayed high until the integrity of the global oil network could be re-established. Longer-term recommendations focused on preventive measures to guard global oil installations and transit routes so that a bad situation did not grow worse.

What surprised me is how sanguine the participants seemed about the political and economic consequences of far more costly oil. But it is highly unlikely that this muted reaction would be mirrored in the real world, especially if U.S. gasoline prices were to reach \$5 or \$6 per gallon. Nor did the players consider other eventualities, such as a meltdown of the global financial system.

What can we learn from this exercise? First: with global demand and supply balanced so closely, and with so little excess production capacity, it doesn't take much for oil prices to skyrocket. In the scenario, a slender loss of supply caused prices to more than double. In the real world, similar results could be caused by any number of events: terror, conflict with Iran over its nuclear program, political instability in Nigeria or irresponsibility in Venezuela, even a hurricane or earthquake. And as opposed to the Davos scenario, there's no guarantee that such a disruption would be short-lived.

A second lesson: waiting to develop a serious energy policy until catastrophe hits only increases the pain. It takes years to increase supply or introduce meaningful energy efficiencies that will not prove overly disruptive or costly. The good news is that we know what needs doing. The bad news is that we remain largely unwilling to act. And by not acting, the United States and other oil-consuming nations leave themselves at the mercy of the market, or to individual producers who would manipulate it.

America's reaction to the recent energy crunch is not reassuring. Proposals for \$100 gasoline rebates. Threats to investigate oil companies. Calls to suspend the already low federal gas tax. None would make an appreciable difference. Energy politics is one thing. Energy policy is fundamentally different. We have too much of the former and not enough of the latter.

Current high prices largely reflect the fact that demand is rising faster than supply. India and China are growing rapidly, as is their consumption of oil and natural gas. The world cannot drill its way out of this conundrum. The answer mostly lies in using less oil--something that will result from increasing efficiency and accelerating alternatives. In the United States, the best way to cut back on demand is through much higher gas taxes. Fuel-efficiency standards for new cars, SUVs and light trucks should be raised. There must be new incentives for companies to produce and people

to purchase fuel-efficient hybrids and advanced diesel cars. The emergence of substitutes can best be hastened not by government-directed R&D but by guarantees that gas taxes will be kept high enough to discourage wanton consumption and to ensure a decent return on investment in alternatives.

Today's situation may lack drama in the sense that there has been no successful terrorist attack on some tanker or refinery. But current energy policy (or the lack of one) empowers some of the most repressive and reckless regimes in the world, further impoverishes hundreds of millions of the world's poor and contributes to global climate change. If this isn't a crisis, what is?

Will We Hit \$100?

Newsweek

By Karen Lowry Miller

5/15

The first oil shock of the 21st century is now upon us, even if it has not (yet) hit the global economy. This time, the early fallout is measured in largely political terms--in the growing cockiness of oil states like Venezuela, the defiance of Iran, the expansion of state oil companies from producing nations like Russia, the backlash against hugely profitable oil giants and the near desperation of incumbent politicians in consuming nations like the United States and Germany. In recent weeks, as the price of oil passed \$70 a barrel, the price of gas topped \$3 a gallon in the United States and ex-oilman George W. Bush unleashed an investigation into possible price manipulation by Big Oil, the old power relations of our oil-based world were clearly being turned upside down.

It may be only a matter of time before the economic shock arrives. Predictions that a \$10 hike in the price per barrel of oil would shave half a point off world growth rates have yet to pan out, but that doesn't mean they won't. Our happy surprise that global growth has yet to slow misses the catch: if the economy can run with a \$70-a-barrel burden on its back, the price is less likely to fall. More and more companies are tacking on fuel surcharges, and the specter of petrol-fueled inflation is rearing its ugly head.

Worse, there is an increasingly strong case, perhaps even an emerging consensus, that we are heading for a new price reality--one that until now has been the province of oil-conspiracy crackpots and environmental end-of-timers. This is the world of \$100 oil. Goldman Sachs analysts Arjun Murti and Brian Singer surprised the markets in March 2005, when prices hovered at about \$47 a barrel, by predicting a "superspike" that would drive oil up from \$50 to as high as \$105--and suggesting prices could remain there for five to 10 years. Now predicting \$100 oil has become respectable. Just look at the futures market, where call options on \$100 barrels--a novelty when the first one appeared last year--are now commonplace.

The reason the new spate of forecasts is so scarily convincing is because they don't rely upon sweeping but unprovable claims that the world is running out of oil. This has been the case put forward for years by "peak oil" theorists, who say today's prices are a symptom of the fact that we have found all the oil we can pump economically, so it's all downhill for supply. Since no one has found a way to X-ray the planet to determine exactly how much oil is left, peak-oil theory is based in part

on faith in pessimistic geology. Oil bulls respond with their own article of faith: that there is oil down there, and improving technology can and will find it.

Some of the most worried analysts now assume that the bulls are right: there is plenty of oil in the earth. But technology alone can't solve the problem--not soon, anyway--if the industry is not deploying it. "Peak oil is a red herring," says Barclays Capital analyst Paul Horsnell. "It's all about fundamentals." The problem is that the major oil-producing nations have not spent enough--and don't plan to spend enough--to meet rising demand, particularly from the United States and China, in the near to medium term. Spooked by past episodes of overspending in boom times, companies have chosen to sit on their cash, or return it to shareholders, rather than build new production or refining facilities. Ultimately, Singer and Murti argue, oil is still a cyclical commodity (not a vanishing resource), and prices will fall back to earth. But they expect an extended period of high prices that could last through 2009 before tapering off through 2014. And already, gas lines have reappeared in the United States, as consumers hunt for the cheapest pump prices.

History suggests that the current fundamentals look a lot like the 1970s. Goldman Sachs research shows that oil prices tend to spike during periods when oil states and companies are investing, then fall as that spending produces new supplies (charts). Thus, prices shot up as investment rose in the late '70s, then fell as that investment yielded a new cushion of spare capacity in the 1980s. The price slump that followed lasted through the late 1990s, depressing investment in oil while the broader market funneled money into the tech stars of the New Economy. Over the past 20 years, spare production capacity has fallen from 15 percent to barely more than 1 percent worldwide, with no immediate prospect of relief. Goldman Sachs analyst Jeffrey Currie calculates that the oil industry needs to invest a stunning \$3.5 trillion over the next decade just to keep up with rising demand. "We call it the revenge of the Old Economy," says Currie.

If anything, the uncertainties surrounding global oil investment are even higher today than in the 1970s. "When you have no margin for error, Murphy's Law kicks in and anything that can go wrong will," says independent oil consultant Lowell Feld. If a confrontation with Iran were to cut off its 2.5 million barrels of exports per day, "there is no one else to make up the slack," says Feld. Deutsche Bank analyst Adam Sieminski argues that a supply cut of 2 million barrels a day would be enough to drive prices to \$100. Global Insight chief economist Nariman Behravesh goes further: "All it takes is a single geopolitical event, such as an attack on Iran, to trigger a major shortage and even \$120 oil."

This situation is the result of a quarter century of underinvestment in oil supply. Since it takes up to seven years for oil investments to yield actual oil, even a crash spending program now wouldn't prevent a superspike. Consider just five of the top 10 oil producers, who together control more than half the world's reserves. The largest reserves are in Saudi Arabia, which accounts for nearly all of today's spare capacity and remains relatively stable, despite recent terror attacks on oil installations. It plans to invest billions to raise its daily output from 9.6 million to 12.5 million barrels by 2009.

The rest of the five are all treading water, or worse. The second largest conventional reserves are in Iran, which produces less today than it did 30 years ago, and is having trouble attracting multinational investors, who are spooked by its defiant pursuit of a nuclear-energy program. In Iraq, where oil production

plummeted after the 2003 invasion, insurgents attack oil facilities once every three days, on average. No surprise, investors are staying away. In Russia, oil investment boomed after the fall of the Soviet Union but has leveled off since. Gennadiy Shmal, president of the Russian Union of Oil and Gas Industrialists, has publicly criticized the Kremlin for spending too little on exploration.

Meanwhile, Venezuela has seen production from its state-owned firm drop 50 percent since 2003 under the radical populist Hugo Chávez, even as he runs foreign investors out of the country. Chávez claims grand plans to spend \$56 billion by 2012 on new production and refineries, but analysts are skeptical about his priorities. Columbia University's Adam Louis Shrier says Chávez "uses oil as a political tool" to advance his social agenda: hospitals, schools, vacation homes for employees. "The national company is not about oil or economic performance," he says.

While oil investment is picking up again, there are reasons to suspect that this cycle will see less money spent more slowly than in the past. One big reason is politics, and not only in Venezuela. Oil-producing nations from the Middle East to Russia are raising the government share of oil revenue to fund the welfare programs that keep reigning princes and populists in power. Social spending is on the rise at a time when tapping old and remote fields is increasingly complex, and expensive. Those costs have also risen because many skilled workers left the industry during the long investment slump.

Social welfare competes for oil dollars throughout the Middle East, one of the few regions where populations are still growing fast. As the number of young people entering the Saudi work force surges, the Saudis need a minimum oil price of \$40 to \$50 to maintain their current system of subsidies for food, housing, education and employment, says Feld. New Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has also promised oil money to fund social programs, and Russian President Vladimir Putin has pledged that oil profits will be used to fight poverty in Russia. All of that siphons off money that could be used to increase oil production.

It also scares off Big Oil, which is sitting on piles of cash but faces a perilous investment climate. To fund his social schemes, Chávez has raised the income tax charged to foreign oil companies from 34 percent to 50 percent, and roughly doubled the cost of royalties to 30 percent; last month he seized an oilfield outright from the French firm Total and broke a contract with Eni of Italy. Taxes are so high in Russia, says Currie, that oil has to reach \$80 a barrel for multinationals to make a 15 percent return on capital.

In some ways, international oil companies have undermined their own incentives to invest, in part by failing to see which way prices were going. Up until 2003 they based investment decisions on projected prices of about \$15 a barrel, says Columbia University's Shrier. Indeed, many were so confident that oil would never top \$30 a barrel that they agreed, in West Africa for example, to pay graduated taxes that reached 100 percent at oil prices above \$30. Shrier estimates that oil companies have raised long-term price estimates to about \$35 a barrel, representing "a fundamental change" in the industry that should open the doors for investment in the future. But it can't come soon enough to slow the pace of a superspike that may already have begun.

The Real Story Of Pricey Oil

Newsweek

By Fareed Zakaria

5/22

In March 2005, when a young Goldman Sachs analyst, Arjun Murti, predicted a doubling in oil prices to \$100 a barrel, some compared the projection with the exaggerated forecasts of the technology era. But with oil at \$70 a barrel, Murti's idea doesn't look bubbly anymore. Now we're experiencing a different conventional wisdom, one that says high oil prices reflect simple economics and there's not much anyone can do about it. Demand is rising, supply can't keep up, so prices rise. But behind the economics lie two powerful political realities that are worth exploring--and that suggest that market fatalism is the wrong response to this looming crisis.

I don't know if the world is running out of oil, a subject of heated debate. Even oil experts really are just guessing. But what's clear is that supply is low because few producers are spending big chunks of money to find and develop new oilfields. Without massive long-term investments, supply cannot keep up with demand. Another Goldman analyst, Jeffrey Currie, estimates that it would take \$3.5 trillion dollars (yes, trillion) in the next decade to keep up with rising demand. Actual investments are going to be a fraction of this number.

Why? Partly because oil companies are fighting the last war. Spooked by the 1980s, when oversupply caused prices to collapse, they have been underinvesting for a decade. But private oil companies--the so-called majors--have reversed course. The problem is that the majors are actually the minors now. Exxon, Chevron and BP are small in comparison with the real giants, the national companies of the major oil-producing countries. They--Saudi Aramco, PetrÃ³leos de Venezuela S.A. --control more than 70 percent of oil production. And mostly they are not investing for the long term. Why? It's politics, stupid.

There are really only five countries that matter in the world of oil: Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, Russia and Venezuela. And in every one of these countries, the government has questionable legitimacy or competence. Thus political leaders use their oil money to buy political support. They provide vast handouts to their people--gas is 40 cents a gallon in Iran!--in hope of keeping them quiet.

Consider the lineup. Saudi Arabia is actually the best of the bunch. While it lavishes its population with benefits, it has also begun spending to build up its supplies. The others are much worse. Russian production was growing 5 to 10 percent a year in the 1990s but is now increasing at merely 2 to 3 percent. Iran is flat, Iraq is down and Venezuelan production has dropped by half since 2003. In order to build up real capacity, these governments would need to take their oil revenues and reinvest them in projects that would take five to 10 years to spout oil. Which of these countries has that level of stability, confidence or competence?

The second political reality is in the United States. For all the talk about China and India, America remains the gorilla of global gas. India consumes 2.5 million barrels of oil a day. America burns 10 times that amount. The single biggest shift in global demand over the past decade has not been the rise of China but the rise of SUVs. Since the mid-1970s the demand for petroleum in Western Europe and Japan has been flat. In the United States it has doubled.

This ever-rising economic demand in America is fueled by politics. Without a loophole in the law, SUVs would be banned. Without artificially low gas prices, Americans would not guzzle as much gas. The American government subsidizes gas in many different ways, big and small. As consumers, we do not pay for the enormous expense involved in policing the Middle East, an expense we would almost certainly not incur if its chief export was carrots. We do not pay for the environmental fallout from burning gasoline. We get free roads and a free ride. And it might get freer. American politicians are jumping all over themselves to provide tax relief because a gallon of gas might hit \$4--while prices in Japan and Europe are close to \$7. I understand why the Saudi regime keeps gas cheap to bribe its citizens. But must America do the same?

President Bush has set up an absurd investigation into price fixing and gouging, which at best will be an exercise in futility. But imagine if he set up a national commission on energy that explained to Americans why prices were high. If the president and Congress were to propose a powerful package of measures--higher gas taxes, fuel-efficiency standards starting at 30 and rising to 40 miles per gallon, tax credits for new technologies--it would begin to wean the United States off its addiction to oil. And, it would signal to the market that demand for oil in the United States was likely to slow and stabilize. The fear, uncertainty and speculation that is built into the price of oil right now would ease. I can see the headline now: government acts boldly; oil prices drop. That's not just good economics, it's good politics.

Fuel Duel

New Yorker

By Dorothy Wickenden

5/22

Last week was another unhappy one for President Bush. His popularity ratings dropped again; news of chaos and civil war flowed unabated out of Iraq; the appointment of the former head of the N.S.A. as the director of the C.I.A. was jeopardized by further reports of domestic wiretapping; and gasoline prices continued to cause distress from coast to coast. And it got worse: the President found his Administration being compared-by his own ostensible supporters-to that of a certain Georgia peanut farmer whose Presidency became a byword for haplessness. "It is no accident," the National Review wrote of a panicky Republican scheme to hand out hundreddollar rebates to angry drivers, "that the proposal closely mirrors a Jimmy Carter-proposed rebate to try to boost the economy, a pathetic initiative from a pathetic administration." The tone of the article echoed that of the Fox News commentator Tony Snow, who, before being recruited as the new White House press secretary, complained that Bush's energy plans were "filled with stuff that even Jimmy Carter abandoned."

The current energy crisis is not yet as spectacular as the one that bedevilled Carter. The economy is not in recession, and there are no gun-wielding protesters enraged by long gas lines. What's more, because the Bush family has for years had close ties to the House of Saud--despite its financial support of Wahhabi clerics who preach jihad--relations with at least one major oil producer are more civil than they were then. A few weeks ago, His Excellency Ali al-Naimi, the Saudi petroleum minister,

participated in an energy forum in Washington, and sounded much like any platitudinous American statesman. "We are at the crossroads on the path to our energy future," he said, and must "avoid repeating the costly mistakes of the past." He even made a joke about conserving energy by turning down the air-conditioning in the building: "It's freezing."

One thing that the two energy crises have in common is that both were preceded by upheavals in the Middle East—in Carter's case the Iranian revolution, in Bush's the war in Iraq. But in many ways the challenges that the United States faces now are more daunting than those of the nineteen-seventies. Iran's current anti-American leader, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, has waved aside American (and European) efforts to halt his nuclear program, noting, "Ultimately, they need us more than we need them." We now compete for oil with voracious energy consumers like China and India. And, as hurricane season approaches (and as the connection between more violent storms and global warming seems to grow increasingly evident), refineries continue to struggle with the disruptions from Katrina.

Even sentimental Democrats today tend to think of the Jimmy Carter of the seventies as a hand-wringing Milquetoast, more rabbit than killer. He and Congress, though, took on the energy emergency with a vigor that seems unimaginable these days. They deregulated oil and gas prices, created the Department of Energy, and got utilities to increase their use of natural gas and coal. They also allocated hefty sums for solar and other alternative-energy sources and pursued President Ford's policy of higher fuel-economy standards for new cars. By the time Carter left office, the consumption of foreign oil had fallen by nearly two million barrels a day, to seven million barrels. Predictably, as oil prices dropped, so did the urge to conserve. Ronald Reagan revoked environmental policies and ripped Carter's solar panels off the White House roof, and Americans learned to love big cars again. We now import about thirteen million barrels of foreign oil a day, an increase of eighty-five per cent.

In the State of the Union address, and again in a speech in April, Bush deplored America's "addiction to oil," rightly describing it as "a matter of national security." He also asked Americans to buy more hybrid and clean-diesel cars, and endorsed the development of solar and wind power—something that must have given Carter a grim sense of vindication. But that was just talk. Bush's energy bill, four years in the making and signed just nine months ago, didn't even mandate increases in fuel-economy standards, which are worse today than they were in 1986: 24.6 miles to the gallon, on average, as opposed to 26.5. (He has since raised the standard for light trucks, by a few miles per gallon, effective 2011.) Ethanol was the bill's favored alternative fuel, since the corn it is mostly made from is grown in the Midwest, where several competitive congressional races are being fought this year. For the most part, though, the bill proposed a predictable array of tax breaks for energy producers, some \$14.5 billion, the vast majority of which went to the coal, natural-gas, nuclear-power, and oil industries.

This approach has not been well received by voters, who recently also learned that in 2005 ExxonMobil enjoyed the highest corporate profit in history—\$36.13 billion—and that its president earned two hundred and fifty thousand dollars a week. With only thirteen per cent of the public approving of Bush's handling of gasoline prices, congressional Republicans are having second thoughts about those oil-company tax breaks, while Democrats focus primarily on a feeble but presumably popular measure that would reduce the federal gas tax for sixty days and increase taxes on oil companies.

What no elected official has yet taken a stand on is the fact that there is an obvious way to begin addressing the energy crisis, one that would reduce our need for foreign oil, encourage fuel efficiency, attack global warming, and maybe banish the Hummer forever: a steep tax on gasoline. The general assumption is that this would be political poison-too many Americans have to drive long distances to work. As a result, the gas tax, which is 18.4 cents a gallon, hasn't been raised since 1993. But if most or all of the proceeds were returned to consumers, in the form of lower payroll taxes, the impact on the economically vulnerable would be minimized. Many economists have advocated such a plan, and even some of the most stalwart anti-tax Republicans, such as Grover Norquist, have expressed support for it. Robert H. Frank, a professor of economics at Cornell, has pointed out that when Carter made a similar proposal it was defeated by opponents who argued that drivers would buy just as much gas as they did before, with the money they got back in reduced taxes. But if people are given the right incentives they are likely to save both ways, by taking their rebates and by buying more fuel-efficient cars, thereby reducing consumption and spending.

After September 11th, Bush had an opportunity to propose such a plan, telling Americans that they could join the war on terror by paying more for gasoline and using less of it. Franklin D. Roosevelt proved after Pearl Harbor that fear can be a powerful spur to civic virtue. Bush, in his address to Congress on September 20, 2001, did not invoke anything like the Rooseveltian "privilege of self-denial." Instead, he promised to protect us from terrorism, "eliminate it, and destroy it where it grows." As for the rest of the nation, Bush said, "Americans are asking: What is expected of us? I ask you to live your lives, and hug your children." Unfortunately, Americans are as fearful as ever, and they are demanding a plausible energy policy. Maybe it's not too late for the "war President" to try something truly brave: tell us the truth about the real costs of oil and the ravaging effects of greenhouse gases, and do what should have been done a generation ago.

The New Energy Realists

The National Interest

By Sen. Richard Lugar

6/5

In August 2005, President Bush asked me to undertake a diplomatic mission to Algeria and Morocco to facilitate the release of the longest-held prisoners of war in the world: 404 Moroccan soldiers, some of whom had been held since the 1970s by the Polisario Front operating out of Algeria. While in the region, I took the opportunity to visit Libya to help move forward the process of normalizing relations between the United States and Libya, and met with senior officials, including Muammar Qaddafi.

But this trip also brought me face to face with the new reality of global economic life. The hotel where I stayed in Tripoli, the Corinthia, was filled with representatives from China, India and Western oil companies who were in Libya to stake out drilling or refining options in this newly opened oil frontier, which has proven reserves of 39 billion barrels--more than Mexico or Nigeria. The world had come to the Corinthia Hotel to compete for the energy opportunities that Libya's expected return to the international mainstream has made so promising.

I had observed the same thing in Algeria, which also has significant reserves of oil and natural gas. Wherever there are proven energy supplies and a government willing to bargain, one can find similar conclaves of oil and gas prospectors.

In particular, the Chinese and the Indians, with one-third of the world's people between them, know that their economic futures are tied to finding sufficient energy resources to sustain their rapid economic growth. China now trails only the United States in global energy consumption; India is further behind, but its population and energy demand are growing rapidly. Chinese and Indian firms are negotiating with anyone willing to sell them an energy lifeline--including regimes, such as Sudan, Burma and Iran, with poor human rights records or records of supporting terrorism.

With less than 5 percent of the world's population, the United States consumes 25 percent of the world's supply of oil. But demand for oil is increasing far more rapidly than we expected even a few years ago. By 2030 the world will be consuming 50 percent more energy than it does today.

For Americans, the gasoline price spikes following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita brought home the tenuousness of short-term energy supplies. But most people still do not fully appreciate our economic vulnerability to sustained high prices--or another energy shock--and the consequences of the heated competition that is already occurring throughout the world to secure energy supplies. If oil prices average \$60 a barrel through 2006, then the United States would spend about \$320 billion on oil imports this year.

Worse, from a security point of view most of the world's oil is concentrated in places that are either hostile to American interests or vulnerable to political upheaval and terrorism. The dangers this poses are not speculative; they are facts of life today. We must respond accordingly.

For the last several decades, the debate over U.S. energy security has pitted pro-oil "realists" against "idealistic" advocates of alternative energy. Pro-oil commentators argue that our current dependence on oil (and on oil imports) is a choice of the free marketplace--we use oil because it is cheap and abundant. Moreover, they contend, alternatives would be more expensive and could only make up a tiny share of the energy consumed. They have implied that those who bemoan oil dependency do not understand that every energy alternative comes with its own problems and limitations. For example, Lee Raymond, the former CEO of ExxonMobil, said in 2005: "There are many alternative forms of energy that people talk about that may be interesting. But they are not consequential on the scale that will be needed, and they may never have a significant impact on the energy balance."

The proponents of alternative energy, for their part, have sometimes fallen into the trap of suggesting that our energy problems are easily solved. This is not the case. Relieving our dependence on oil in any meaningful way is going to take great investments of time, money and political will. There is no silver bullet.

It is now clear that the true realists are those who understand that without major changes in the way we get our energy, life in America will be far more difficult in the coming decades. No one who cares about U.S. foreign policy, national security and long-term economic growth can afford to ignore what is happening in Iran, Russia, Venezuela or even in the lobby of the Corinthia Hotel. And in the decades to come, oil supplies will be stretched to the limit by economic growth in both the industrialized West and in large, rapidly growing economies. As former Secretary of

Energy James Schlesinger noted in these pages in the Winter 2005/06 issue, "the day of reckoning draws nigh"--the point at which rising demand can no longer be accommodated.

This is why the new energy realists believe that a laissez faire energy policy based solely on market evolution is a naive posture--especially when most of the world's oil and natural gas is not controlled by market forces. Geology and politics have created petro-superpowers that nearly monopolize the world's oil supply. Robin West of PFC Energy estimates that foreign governments, through their national oil companies, control more than three-quarters of the world's oil reserves. These governments set prices through their investment and production decisions, and they have wide latitude to shut off the taps for political reasons.

As we approach the point where the world's oil-hungry economies are competing for insufficient supplies of energy, oil will become an even stronger magnet for conflict and military action than it already is. And as more cash flows into the coffers of the petro-states, we can expect increased opportunities for corruption and less pressure to engage in political and economic reform.

At the same time, American leverage around the world--already declining due to our energy dependence--will further decrease. Energy is the albatross of U.S. national security. Already we are witnessing how oil and natural gas have become the currencies by which energy-rich countries leverage their interests against import-dependent nations such as ours. Iran has repeatedly threatened to cut off oil exports if economic sanctions are imposed against it for its nuclear activities. Similarly, Hugo Chavez in Venezuela has threatened an oil-export embargo against the United States. The consequences of such actions could be severe. Hillard Huntington, an expert on economic modeling from Stanford University, recently told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that if an external shock were to lead to an abrupt doubling of world crude oil prices, some analysts estimate that the level of real U.S. GDP could decline by 5 percent.

We are seeing Iran and Venezuela cultivate energy relationships with nations that are in a position to block economic sanctions or provide other political assistance. We have witnessed, for instance, Venezuela's Chavez use his petro-dollars to buy \$1 billion of Argentinian bonds to help Argentina pay off its loans to the International Monetary Fund and lessen its dependence on the Washington-based institution. He has used the promise of low-cost oil to entice 13 Caribbean nations into a Venezuelan-led organization called PetroCaribe. Through the Venezuelan-owned American oil refiner CITGO, he has subsidized heating oil in New England.

Perhaps the most dramatic example in recent months of attempts to use energy exports to achieve political ends--and the subsequent disruption this can cause--was the Russian-Ukrainian gas dispute. On January 1, Russia cut gas exports to Ukraine after Ukraine refused to agree to a four-fold increase in the price. The price increase had been triggered by Ukraine's unwillingness to enter into a Russian-dominated economic zone (which could have had serious implications for Ukraine's desire to join the European Union and NATO). This act led to sharp drops in gas supplies from Russia reaching European countries that depend on the pipelines that transit across Ukraine--and Russia charged that Ukraine was diverting gas intended for Austria, Italy, France, Hungary and other European states.

After several days, the confrontation was resolved. Ukraine agreed to accept a near doubling of the price of natural gas sold by Russia to Ukraine. But the episode

underscored that in the energy-hungry world of the 21st century, conventional warfare is not the only type of conflict between nations. What would have been the cost to Ukraine if the gas had stayed shut off, not for days, but weeks or months in wintertime? This could cause hardship and economic loss equivalent to the damage that might be wrought by a conventional military attack. What might be the ramifications if, in circumstances of severe energy deprivation, a country might turn to desperate measures--taking control of pipelines or seizing oil tankers on the high seas? And what would the use of energy as a weapon mean in terms of traditional security guarantees? If Ukraine had been a member of NATO in 2005, what would have been the obligations of the other members of the alliance in such a situation?

Energy security is an indispensable part of national security, and our priorities should be set accordingly. In my remarks at the Brookings Institution on March 13, I outlined a legislative agenda that would help us advance real energy security. In particular, our goal should be to replace hydrocarbons with carbohydrates.

Secretary Schlesinger spoke forthrightly when he noted that "the transition away from conventional oil as the principal source of energy for raising the living standards of the world's population . . . will be the greatest challenge this country and the world will face. . . . The longer we delay, the greater will be the subsequent trauma." But the difficulty of solving the problem does not make it any less necessary. President Bush understands this, as he indicated with his surprising declaration in his 2006 State of the Union address, "We are addicted to oil."

To start, we must end oil's near monopoly on the transportation sector, which accounts for 68 percent of American oil consumption. I believe that biofuels, combined with hybrid and other technologies, can begin to move us away from our extreme dependence on oil in the next decade. Corn-based ethanol is already providing many Midwesterners with a lower-cost fuel option. Cellulosic ethanol, which is made of more plentiful and less expensive biomass, is poised for commercial take-off. Ethanol can be easily introduced into the current transportation infrastructure through E-85, a blend of gasoline (15 percent) and ethanol (85 percent), in combination with flexible-fuel vehicles, which use inexpensive, off-the-shelf technology to burn both regular gasoline and E-85. We must quickly boost both supply and demand for ethanol through incentives and mandates to increase the number of ethanol production plants, gas stations that sell E-85 and cars that can use it.

While we begin the transition at home, we should also reinvigorate and expand our energy partnerships abroad. I have introduced framework legislation that calls for a realignment of our diplomatic priorities to meet energy security challenges. Partnerships with foreign governments can help speed our conversion to real energy security and strike new global alliances. For instance, we can gain greater security from oil-supply disruptions if we develop contingency plans in advance with India and China in conjunction with the developed countries that are members of the International Energy Agency. Many poorer states currently have no strategic petroleum reserves or other mechanisms for coping with a major supply disruption. If the United States and other developed countries work with these nations on emergency-preparedness measures, we can reduce the risk of economic devastation and conflict among poor nations that might result from an energy-supply shock.

We also must recognize that we live in an energy interdependent world, and America's efforts to lessen its own petroleum use will not have their maximum potential geopolitical impact if other countries simply consume the oil we save,

keeping markets tight, prices high and the producers in control. It is by working with other major consumers, such as India and China, to develop sustainable alternative energy supplies that we can best improve our own energy security. At the same time, we must be realistic and acknowledge that oil will remain an important energy source. Therefore, it is in our interest to work with the oil-producing countries toward better investment climates, greater political stability, improved environmental controls and other measures that will enhance the security of supplies.

At the coming G-8 meeting, energy will be at the top of the agenda. This will be an important forum where the United States can take the lead and explain to other nations that we are in a new energy era. The solutions to the problems faced by all countries--developed and developing--will come not from the traditional means of more drilling and more pipelines, but from major strides in efficiency and from alternative, sustainable energy options. In this commonality of interests there is cause for optimism. Despite our import dependence today, the United States is in a strong position to choose a different path, a path toward real energy security. These are problems that can be solved. We must act now. We must act together.

The Honorable Richard G. Lugar, a Republican Senator from Indiana, is chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.
