

# MID-EAST e-NEWS

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## Contexts

<b>Religious</b>	
<i>Who are the Shi'ites? (Part 2)</i>	2
<b>Political</b>	
<i>The New Iraqi Currency</i>	2
<b>Historical</b>	
<i>How far back does it go? (Part 3)</i>	3
<b>Feedback</b>	
<i>Comments and Questions</i>	3
<b>Geographical</b>	
<i>The Jordan River</i>	4

## This month

Sept.		
14	S	
15	M	Isr Israel threat to kill Arafat
16	T	Pal Islamic Jihad leader killed
17	W	Pal Arafat offers ceasefire
18	T	
19	F	
20	S	
21	S	Irq Mortar – kills 2 soldiers
		Irq Attempted assassination of Aqila al-Hashimi
22	M	Irq Bomb at UN HQ kills two
		Pal Arafat makes truce offer
23	T	
24	W	Irq Bush: Saddam not linked to Sept. 11 <sup>th</sup>
25	T	Irq UN reduces staff in Iraq
		Irq Aqila al-Hashemi dies
26	F	Jor Jordan arrests Abu Sayyaf
		Irq 9 civilians killed by shell aimed at US base
27	S	
28	S	
29	M	Irq 6-hour battle in Habbaniya
		Irq Assassination attempt on Shiite constitutional official
30	T	
Oct	W	Isr Israeli extends barrier
1		Irq Iraqis battle police in demonstration for jobs
2	T	
3	F	Irq Kay Report: Saddam had intention, ability for WMDs
4	S	Isr Haifa bomb kills 19
		Irq Soldiers riot over back pay
5	S	Isr Isr. bombs camp in Syria
6	M	Pal Qorei 'to arrest activists'
7	T	Pal Qorei sworn in
		Afg Taliban fight – 300 killed
		Irq Turkey OKs troops
8	W	
9	T	Pal Qorei threatens to quit
		Irq Police station bomb kills 8
		Afg Uzbeks - Tajiks fight
10	F	Isr Big raid into Gaza kills 7
		Irq 2 US troops die in Sadr City

## Welcome

Sitting having coffee the other day, we saw a group of soccer players arriving at a small hotel in West Amman. Catching the eye of one of the older men accompanying them he answered in a German accent, "these are the Iraqi national soccer team. We have just arrived from Baghdad." We never did get to see where in Jordan they were playing, but learned later that they are flying to Malaysia to participate in some games there. A comment by one of the players that I heard on the radio reminds us of the changes they have seen: "Now we can play freely, without the thought of punishment after the match." A few months ago it would not have been good news to know that Uday Hussein had become interested in the progress of your soccer team.

Schools began in Iraq last week, and many of them have seen improvements over the recent months, even beyond the removal of Saddam Hussein's image from textbooks. With little investment having been made in the buildings or equipment over the years, most schools have been in need of improvements. This is one of the projects that the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) has been involved in. Soldiers trained for war have been given responsibility over infrastructure projects for school districts, with a 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant from the 325<sup>th</sup> Airborne being responsible for the 6 districts within his battalion's sector. Other schools in Basra, that so far have not benefited from development projects, received \$500 each to meet emergency repair costs. (See photo).



On October 15th Iraq sees a new currency. In this issue we introduce you to the new notes, which will replace those that currently carry the image of Saddam Hussein (the most recent printing, in July, being done by the CPA). Forgeries of the high denomination notes (10,000 Iraqi Dinars) have decreased their value. With a dollar buying 2,000 ID the new denominations are necessary.

The CPA is composed of military and non-military personnel, and is involved in infrastructure projects – many that needed improvement even before the invasion. After watching CNN the other day, one may have got the impression that the soldiers delivering desks at the beginning of the school year were doing it for the photo opportunity. While talking with a member of the CPA at church this weekend I was reminded that these same soldiers have been there throughout the summer, working on construction projects, painting walls, wiring lights and fans, to ensure that the schools were ready for the children.

If you are interested in finding out more about the CPA in Iraq, try their web site. It's easy to remember at [www.CPA-Iraq.org](http://www.CPA-Iraq.org)

Coming next:

### ***Who are the Wahhabis?***

An analysis of Saudi Wahhabism, and how it affects its followers.

### ***Attempts at Peace***

A summary of the attempts to solve the Palestine-Israel conflict.

### ***The Ancient Churches***

A description of the historic churches in the Middle East.

Who are the Shi'ites? (Part 2)

One consequence of the devotion of Shias to their Imams, is the division that this can cause within the religious group. Shia leaders, even within Iraq, oppose each other's teachings, and their adherents frequently come to violence.

A second consequence to be kept in mind from a political perspective is the voting blocks. To a man, Shi'ites will vote for their religious leader or, if he is not standing for office, for the person he nominates. This attitude will affect any move towards democracy in regions dominated by Shia Islam.

Ayatollah Sistani is said to be the senior cleric of the Shi'ites (or *source*, from 'source of wisdom'). He is 73 years old, and rarely makes public pronouncements, but is known as a voice for moderation in secular affairs. Another significant figure is Muqtada as-Sadr. The as-Sadr family has historical importance in the Shia community. Muqtada's father – Baqir as-Sadr – was recognized as a *source* until being assassinated by Saddam Hussein in 1999. (*As-Sadr city* is a Shi'ite slum area in northern Baghdad. Until the invasion it was named Saddam city). Muqtada is one of those promoting the establishment of an Islamic state in Iraq.

Ayatollah Said al-Hakim was killed by a large bomb on August 30<sup>th</sup> (after an earlier attempt on Aug. 25<sup>th</sup>). His nephew is leader of the Supreme Council of Iraq



Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (1902-1989) and Hussein Khomeini (b.1957)

Shi'ites and member of the US Governing Council for Iraq. He had opposed US intervention in Iraq, but counseled restraint and non-violence. His death followed that of another Shia cleric, Abdul Majid al-Khoei on April 10<sup>th</sup>, the day after the occupation of Baghdad. These deaths illustrate the continuing political power struggle within the Iraqi community. Al-Hakim's death has been blamed on followers of Muqtada al-Sadr, but may possibly have been the work of Baathists.

Currently Shi'ites are debating – and disagreeing on – the topic of the Islamic State. Their basic beliefs state that this can never be achieved until the return of their messiah, the 12<sup>th</sup> Imam. This is the position of Ayatollah Sistani, and also of Hussein Khomeini, the grandson of Ayotallah Ruhollah Khomeini (who led the Iranian revolution of 1979). Others hold, however, that they should strive for the Islamic State even as they wait for the Imam's return.

The Iranian Republic founded by the revolution of 1979 is in its way an anomaly, in that it is the establishment of a religious state in a branch of Islam that denies the possibility of such a state.

The New Iraqi Currency

The Coalition Provisional Authority of Iraq, led by Paul Bremer, had intended to wait until a new government had been installed before issuing a new currency. Bremer had, by his own account, been embarrassed in July to have to re-issue the 'Saddam' dinar, after having been the one to insist that all images of Saddam Hussein be removed from official publications. What made it necessary was the need to place in circulation an increased number of dinars, to counteract a liquidity problem that was growing daily. (The dinar was then worth less than a tenth of a cent.)



A 250 Dinar note from 1994

In some areas of northern Iraq the Kurds are still using a currency that Saddam himself replaced in 1991. It has become known as the 'swiss' dinar, as opposed to the lower quality 'print' dinar that replaced it. The lower quality of manufacture has seen a thriving forgery industry counterfeiting the 10,000 dinar note.



The new currency

(50, 250, 1000, 5000, 10000, 25000 dinars)

From October 15<sup>th</sup> a new currency will replace both of these. The 6 new denominations will resemble earlier dinars, from the 1930s and later, carrying pictures of historic buildings around Iraq.

The print dinar will be exchanged at parity with the New Dinar, with the 'swiss' dinar buying 150 New Dinars, reflecting its stronger purchasing power. The public in Iraq will have three months to replace their old dinars, of either variety.

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### *How far back does it go? (Part 3)*

In this issue we continue to peel away the horizons that have played a part in shaping the current Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In Issues 1 and 2 we looked at the 1967 and 1948 causes of the Palestinian *diaspora*, and now we will review the events that led up to the formation of the state of Israel.

Our next horizon, World War I, stands starkly against the century of history of which it forms the bookend. Until this year the Ottoman Empire had maintained control – to a greater or lesser extent – over the Middle East from the Balkans and Egypt to the entire land of Arabia. It had grown dissolute over time and now, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, was about to collapse. The *Eastern Question*, of how to parcel out the Turkish-controlled lands, was a point of discussion between Britain, France and Russia. The Ottoman Empire might have survived longer if it was not for Europe's internal problems, which resulted – sparked by the assassination of the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne – in the conflagration we know as the First World War. The Ottoman Empire came in on the side of the Axis powers (German, Austro-Hungary and Italy) with Britain, France and Russia allied together.

To open an eastern front, Britain sought the assistance of Sharif Hussein of the Hejaz, and the Arab tribes that owed him allegiance. (An attempt to enlist Saudi tribes failed when Britain's envoy, Capt. Wm. Shakespeare, was killed in a tribal skirmish). In the famous correspondence with Sharif Hussein Britain led the Arabs to believe that they would receive independence in all

regions from Damascus south. One letter from Sir Henry McMahon is dated 24 October, 1915.

Within a year, in its wartime negotiations with France, Britain was also promising France control over territory in what is now Lebanon and Syria. The text of the *Sykes-Picot Agreement* of September 1916 is qualified by the proviso "that the cooperation of the Arabs is secured" and that the Arabs should "fulfill the conditions and obtain the towns of Homs, Hama and Damascus."

A third document was prepared in November of the same year, 1917. This was written to the British Zionist, Baron Rothschild, reassuring him of the British support for Jews wishing to settle in Palestine. Jews had been a presence in the land throughout the Ottoman period (since 1517) and before, but the growth of Zionism had begun to increase their numbers in Palestine. In 1917 Jews formed about 8% of the population. Arthur Balfour, for the British government, wrote this:

His Majesty's government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a National Home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.

After the war these three groups would strive to make these promises a reality.

*Next issue: The British Mandate.*



Sharif Hussein

### *Feedback*

*I appreciate the newsletter! Although it is factual and appears to be balanced, I might warn you that in my experience, some in this region could become offended by it - their perception of the facts and the truth may be very different from that which you express. Just a word of caution.* From a reader living in Jordan

*I would suggest you read O Jerusalem for a balanced point of view. It was written by two French reporters, Larry Collins and Dominique LaPierre, historically chronicling the birth of Israel.* In a letter from Europe

Incidentally, since we are mentioning relevant books, I found One Palestine, Complete, by Tom Segev, to be a great help in my preparation of a Middle East History text book we use in school.

*Thanks for putting together the e-news. I'm a bit dismayed that most of what you sent is not considered common knowledge, but I realize that our world is basically illiterate on most subjects (don't get me started on biblical and theological illiteracy!). However, I'm sure that as a classroom teacher, you feel that pain far worse than me.* A pastor in Texas.

### The Jordan River

The River Jordan feeds into Lake Tiberias (the Sea of Galilee) from the slopes of Mount Hermon. Its source there is at about 2,750 meters (9,000 ft.) above sea level. Flowing south it covers a direct distance of 161 km (100 miles) and descends to 410m below sea level before reaching its destination, the Dead Sea. It is well known that the Dead Sea is below sea level (currently at about 410m below) but so is Lake Tiberias since the Jordan dips below sea level just before entering the lake. In the remaining portion of its journey, the Jordan is descending through the northern reaches of the Great Rift Valley, which eventually extends all the way south to Kenya.

With the increase in population over the last 100 years the value of water in this semi-arid region is significant, and the source of some tension. (Only last year Lebanon and Israel were sparring over whether Lebanon had the right to take some water from a northern tributary of the Jordan.) A canal /pipeline running the length of Israel carries water from Tiberias to the Negev, between Gaza and Beersheba.

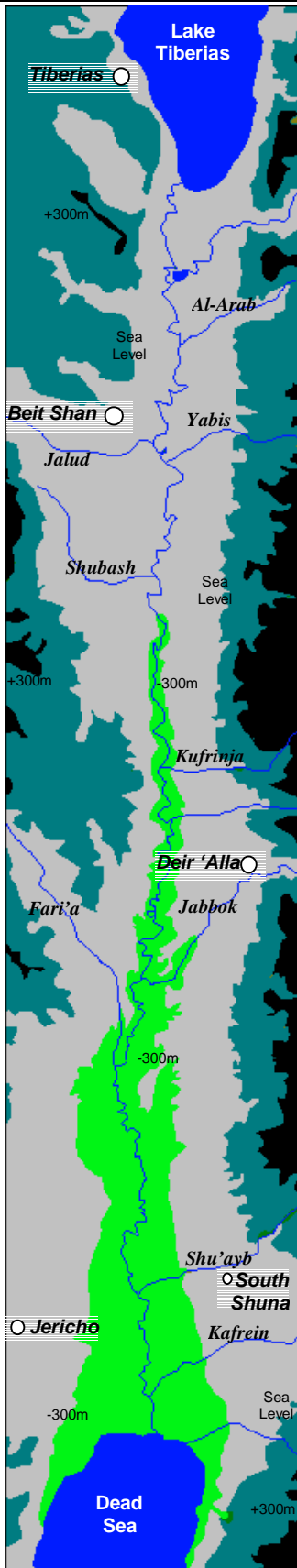
Also, part of the 1994 peace treaty between Jordan and Israel meant that Jordan would be able to withdraw some of the water from the lake. (The treaty even stipulates from which level the water is taken.) Consequently, the amount of water exiting Lake Tiberias is much reduced compared to that of even 50 years ago. Not far south of Tiberias the Jordan is joined by the Yarmouk, part of the border between Syria and Jordan. New dams are being built on the Yarmouk even now. Close to the confluence of the rivers is a lake built to catch the water of the two rivers, and allow it to be distributed for supply to irrigation and drinking water systems as necessary.



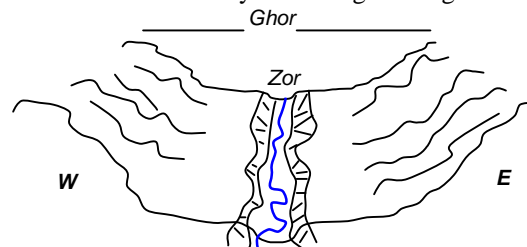
The Jordan today, then, is but a trickle compared to the flood that would pour down the valley not too many generations ago. An early 20<sup>th</sup>

Century archaeologist describes the *jungle of the Jordan*, so fertile was its path.

The Jordan valley is actually comprised of two valleys, known locally as the *Ghor* and the *Zor*. The *Zor* is a valley within a valley (see diagram) and itself may be as wide as a kilometer, or as narrow as 100m. When it is at



its widest the Zor provides flat fertile ground for two or more harvests a year of irrigated vegetables.



As the Jordan heads south it passes various towns and villages that have Biblical and contemporary significance. (To their inhabitants, all towns are significant!)

Beit Shan is one of just two river crossing points between Jordan and Israel. It is there that the bodies of Saul and Jonathan were hung, after being killed by the Philistines. The men of Jabesh Gilead (NE of Deir 'Alla) retrieved their bodies and gave them a decent burial, as recorded in 1 Samuel 31.

Deir 'Alla itself is interesting for a very prominent *Tell*, a large mound containing the ruins of successive periods of towns built on the same site. In the ruins of a temple uncovered on this tell were some tablets bearing the name of a priest called Balaam. We will probably never be sure if this was the same Balaam, but the date of origin seems to be appropriate. He had been killed by the Israelites (Numbers 31:8) in the same region. Tell Deir 'Alla is suspected to be the Succoth of the time of King David. It is located at the 'mouth' of the river Zarqa (the Biblical *Jabbok*).

Ancient Jericho, destroyed by Joshua and the Israelites after crossing the Jordan, is to the west city today. The contemporary Palestinian city is today hemmed in by deep ditches as a security measure. The road from Jericho to the small town of South Shuna (Jordan) is the second border crossing between the two countries. This is frequently closed, partly due to its proximity to the West Bank during periods of trouble.

On Wadi Kafrein, adjacent to the Jordan, is *Bethabara*, the site of Jesus' baptism. The ruins of churches erected during Byzantine times can be found here.

Running the length of the Jordan valley is the East Ghor Canal, now the Abdullah Canal, which carries water from the Yarmouk river to supply irrigation projects in the Ghor. A large proportion of what it carries is also pumped up 1000 meters to the water treatment plant that supplies much of Amman with its drinking water.

What remains of the Jordan by the time it reaches the Dead Sea (its fresh sources having been caught by numerous dams) is a limpid, salty shadow of what it used to be.